

44. VISHNU

Tan Phu site, Tan Hoi village, An Giang Province, 7th century

Bronze, H: 23 cm

Museum of Vietnamese History, Ho Chi Minh City, BTL5 1585

34

For money, see *L'Archéologie du Delta du Mekong*, Publications de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient, vol. 53 (Paris: l'École française d'Extrême-Orient, 1962), 3:135–37.

Vishnu was the most popular Hindu god during the Fu Nan period; four-armed images of him are abundant throughout the Mekong delta region. In his upper left hand, he holds a conch (*shanka*, symbol of origin of existence), while the wheel (*cakra*, symbol of power) that would have been in his upper right hand is broken. The lower left hand holds a mace, which also serves to support the figure, while he holds a round ball of earth (*bhu*) in his right. The long *dhoti* recalls earlier images of Vishnu, but also suggests south Indian influence, as Pallava figures wore long skirts; little else here recalls Indian sculpture. The mitered headdress is also characteristic.

The silvery patina of this piece suggests it is bronze of high tin content, which is typical of Southeast Asian bronzes. Vishnu's hair hangs down to a "V" between his shoulder blades; his face is very worn, and the details of his features are no longer visible. The large scale of the hands is a feature typical of much early Southeast Asian sculpture,

and though the rest of the figure is quite delicately modeled, the feet are poorly formed. Another feature typical of many of the early Vishnus is the backward thrust the extra pair of upper arms gives to the doubled shoulders. The sculpture, which entered the museum collection in 1944, was discovered near the Quan Am pagoda near Tan Hoi, along with a pestle and some money of the Fu Nan period.³⁴

LITERATURE

Louis Malleret, *L'Archéologie du Delta du Mekong*, vol. 2, 1960.