

46. DURGA

Luu Nghiep An village, Tra Vinh Province, 7th–8th century

Stone, H: 76.2 cm × W: 32.3 cm × D: 16 cm

Museum of Vietnamese History, Ho Chi Minh City, BTLS 5552

The bull's head on the base identifies this figure as Durga, an important Hindu goddess worshipped independently, but also considered a form of Uma, Shiva's consort. When none of the gods could defeat the demon Mahisha, they turned to the goddess Durga to carry their weapons to conquer him. When he took the form of a bull, she vanquished him, an act that came to symbolize religious attainment or victory. In the north of India, Durga is depicted in an active pose overcoming Mahisha, but by the second half of the seventh century in south India, this iconography, with merely the bull's head shown, is common for Pallava depictions. In later depictions, she is often shown with a large number of arms, each bearing the gods' weapons, while here she would have had a weapon in each of her four hands. Only the dagger in her upper right hand and the shield in her upper left are extant.

She wears the mitered headdress generally identified with Vishnu, which reveals a fringe in front, but no locks behind. The incised lines on her skirt, intended to depict folds and a belt, instead appear as merely decorative. An

armature, a common element of the earliest large-scale stone sculptures of the Mekong delta, supports the sculpture and suggests it cannot be much later than the end of the seventh century, as sculptors have become more confident by the eighth century. The armature, the posts supporting the lower hands, and the sculptor's conscious use of Pallava iconography of the second half of the seventh century, suggests a late-seventh-century to early-eighth-century date.

LITERATURE

Louis Malleret, *Catalogue général des collections: comprenant des notices descriptives et explicatives, accompagnées de 31 illustrations*, Musée Blanchard de la Brosse, Tome I, 1937; Henri Parmentier, *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient*, 1902; Henri Parmentier, *Inventaire descriptif des monuments cams de l'Annam* 1, 1918–19; Henri Parmentier, *L'Art Khmer primitive* I, 1927.