

Unit 3: South, East, and Southeast Asia

Hindu Art, Architecture, and Other Stuff



Terra cotta warriors from mausoleum of the first Qin emperor of China. Qin Dynasty. c. 221–209 B.C.E. Painted terra cotta.

In March 1974, a group of peasants digging a well in drought-parched Shaanxi province in northwest China unearthed fragments of a clay figure—the first evidence of what would turn out to be one of the greatest archaeological discoveries of modern times. Near the unexcavated tomb of Qin Shi Huangdi—who had proclaimed himself first emperor of China in 221 B.C.—lay an extraordinary underground treasure: an entire army of life-size terra cotta soldiers and horses, interred for more than 2,000 years

The site, where Qin Shi Huangdi's ancient capital of Xianyang once stood, lies a half-hour drive from traffic-clogged Xi'an (pop. 8.5 million). It is a dry, scrubby land planted in persimmon and pomegranate—bitterly cold in winter and scorching hot in summer—marked by dun-colored hills pocked with caves. But hotels and a roadside souvenir emporium selling five-foot-tall pottery figures suggest that something other than fruit cultivation is going on here.

Over the past 35 years, archaeologists have located some 600 pits, a complex of underground vaults as yet largely unexcavated, across a 22-square-mile area. Some are hard to get to, but three major



pits are easily accessible, enclosed inside the four-acre Museum of the Terracotta Army, constructed around the discovery site and opened in 1979. In one pit, long columns of warriors, reassembled from broken pieces, stand in formation. With their topknots or caps, their tunics or armored vests, their goatees or close-cropped beards, the soldiers exhibit an astonishing individuality. A second pit inside the museum demonstrates how they appeared when they were found: some stand upright, buried to their shoulders in soil, while others lie toppled on their backs, alongside fallen and cracked clay horses. The site ranks with the Great Wall and Beijing's Forbidden City as one of the premier tourist attractions within China.

The stupendous find at first seemed to reinforce conventional thinking—that the first emperor had been a relentless warmonger who cared only for military might. As archaeologists have learned during the past decade, however, that assessment was incomplete. Qin Shi Huangdi may have conquered China with his army, but he held it together with a civil administration system that endured for centuries. Among

other accomplishments, the emperor standardized weights and measures and introduced a uniform writing script.

Recent digs have revealed that in addition to the clay soldiers, Qin Shi Huangdi's underground realm, presumably a facsimile of the court that surrounded him during his lifetime, is also populated by delightfully realistic waterfowl, crafted from bronze and serenaded by terra cotta musicians. The emperor's clay retinue includes terra cotta officials and even troupes of acrobats, slightly smaller than the soldiers but created with the same methods. "We find the underground pits are an imitation of the real organization in the Qin dynasty," says Duan Qingbo, head of the excavation team at the Shaanxi Provincial Research Institute for Archaeology. "People thought when the emperor died, he took just a lot of pottery army soldiers with him. Now they realize he took a whole political system with him."



Qin Shi Huangdi decreed a mass-production approach; artisans turned out figures almost like cars on an assembly line. Clay, unlike bronze, lends itself to quick and cheap fabrication. Workers built bodies, then customized them with heads, hats, shoes, mustaches, ears and so on, made in small molds. Some of the figures appear so strikingly individual they seem modeled on real people, though that is unlikely. "These probably weren't portraits in the Western sense," says Hiromi Kinoshita, who helped curate the exhibition at the British Museum. Instead, they may have been aggregate portraits: the ceramicists, says Kinoshita, "could have been told that you need to represent all the different types of people who come from different regions of China."

The first emperor's capital, Xianyang, was a large metropolis, where he reportedly erected more than 270 palaces, of which only a single foundation is known to survive. Each time Qin Shi Huangdi conquered a rival state, he is said to have transported its ruling families to Xianyang, housing the vanquished in replicas of palaces they had left behind. At the same time, the emperor directed construction of his tomb complex; some 720,000 workers reportedly labored on these vast projects.

Upon the death of his father, Yiren, in 246 B.C., the future Qin Shi Huangdi—then a prince named Ying Zheng who was around age 13—ascended the throne. The kingdom, celebrated for its horsemen, sat on the margin of civilization, regarded by its easterly rivals as a semi-savage wasteland. Its governing philosophy was as harsh as its terrain. Elsewhere in China, Confucianism held that a well-run state should be administered by the same precepts governing a family: mutual obligation and respect. Qin rulers, however, subscribed to a doctrine known as legalism, which rested on the administration of punitive laws.

In his early 20s, Ying Zheng turned for guidance to a visionary statesman, Li Si, who likely initiated many of his sovereign's accomplishments. Under Li's tutelage, Ying Zheng introduced a uniform script (thereby enabling subjects of vastly different dialects to communicate). Standardization, a hallmark of the Qin state, was applied to weaponry as well: should an arrow shaft snap, or the trigger on a repeating crossbow malfunction, the component could be easily replaced. The young ruler also presided over creation of an advanced agricultural infrastructure that incorporated irrigation canals and storage granaries.

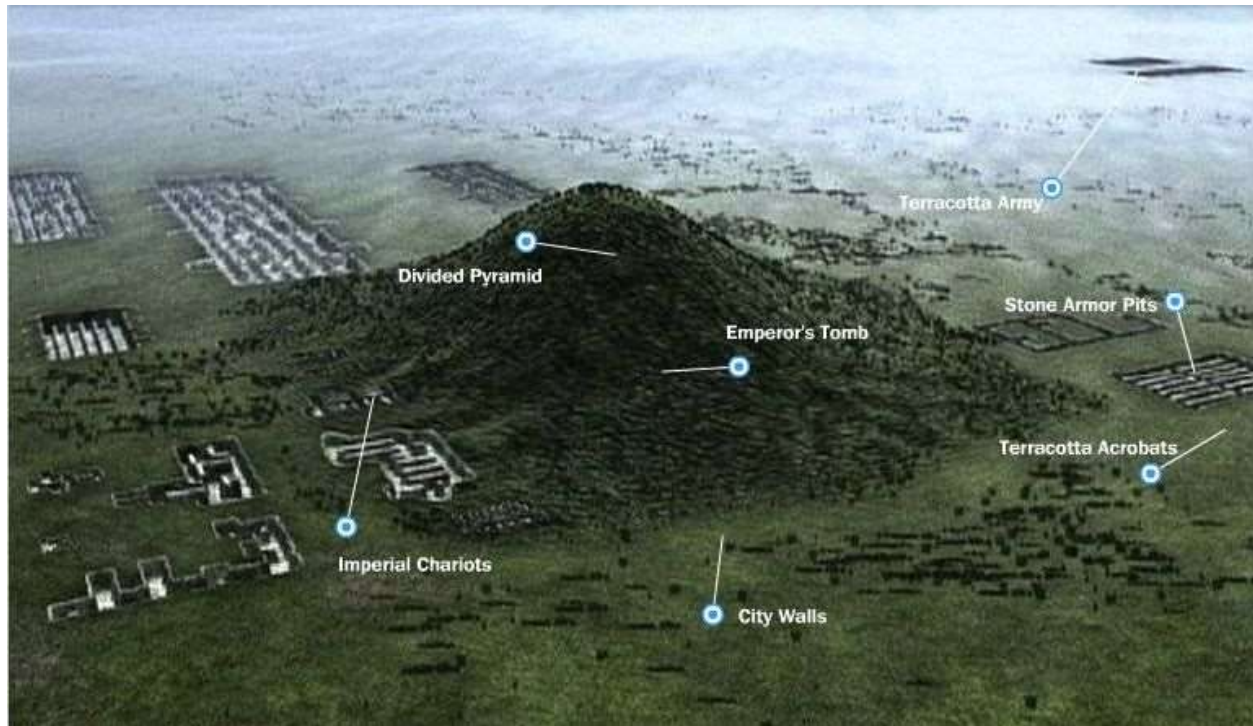
Ying Zheng set about conquering the warring states that surrounded him in the late third century B.C. As his armies advanced, principalities fell. No one could stop consolidation of an empire that eventually stretched from parts of present-day Sichuan in the west to coastal regions along the East China Sea. Having unified the entire civilized world as he knew it, Ying Zheng in 221 B.C. renamed himself Qin Shi Huangdi, translated as First Emperor of Qin. He then invested in infrastructure and built massive fortifications.

As the grandeur of his tomb complex suggests, Qin Shi Huangdi kept an eye on posterity. But he also longed to extend his life on earth—perhaps indefinitely. Alchemists informed the emperor that magical herbs were to be found on what they claimed were three Islands of the Immortals in the East China Sea. The emissaries most likely to gain entry to this mystical realm, they asserted, were uncorrupted children; in 219 B.C., Qin Shi Huangdi reportedly dispatched several thousand youngsters to search for the islands. They never returned. Four years later, the emperor sent three alchemists to retrieve the herbs. One of them made it back, recounting a tale of a giant fish guarding the islands. Legend has it that the first emperor resolved to lead the next search party himself; on the expedition, the story goes, he used a repeating crossbow to kill a huge fish. But instead of discovering life-preserving elixirs, the emperor contracted a fatal illness.

As he lay dying in 210 B.C., 49-year-old Qin Shi Huangdi decreed that his estranged eldest son, Ying Fusu, should inherit the empire. The choice undercut the ambitions of a powerful royal counselor, Zhao Gao, who believed he could govern the country behind the scenes if a more malleable successor were installed. To conceal Qin Shi Huangdi's death—and disguise the stench of a decomposing corpse—until the travelers returned to the capital, Zhao Gao took on a cargo of salted fish. The delaying tactic worked. Once Zhao Gao managed to return to Xianyang, he was able to operate on his home turf. He managed to transfer power to Ying Huhai, a younger, weaker son.

Ultimately, however, the scheme failed. Zhao Gao could not maintain order and the country descended into civil war. The Qin dynasty outlived Qin Shi Huangdi by only four years. The second emperor committed suicide; Zhao Gao eventually was killed. Various rebel forces coalesced into a new dynasty, the Western Han.

For archaeologists, one indicator that Qin rule had collapsed suddenly was the extensive damage to the terra cotta army. As order broke down, marauding forces raided the pits where clay soldiers stood guard and plundered their real weapons. Raging fires, possibly set deliberately, followed the ransacking, weakening support pillars for wooden ceilings, which crashed down and smashed the figures. Some 2,000 years later, archaeologists discovered charring on the walls of one pit.



The emperor's tomb lies beneath a forested hill, surrounded by cultivated fields about a half-mile from the museum. Out of reverence for an imperial resting place and concerns about preserving what might be unearthed there, the site has not been excavated. According to a description written a century after the emperor's death, the tomb contains a wealth of wonders, including man-made streambeds contoured to resemble the Yellow and Yangtze rivers, flowing with shimmering, quicksilver mercury that mimics coursing water. (Analysis of soil in the mound has indeed revealed a high level of mercury.)

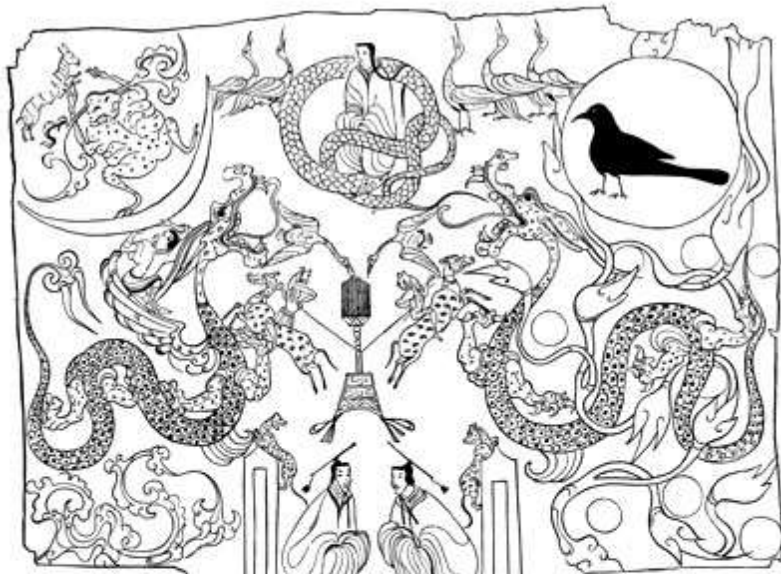
Yet answers about the tomb are not likely to emerge anytime soon. "I have a dream that one day science can develop so that we can tell what is here without disturbing the emperor, who has slept here for 2,000 years," says Wu Yongqi, director of the Museum of the Terracotta Army. "I don't think we have good scientific techniques to protect what we find in the underground palace. Especially if we find paper, silk or textiles from plants or animals; it would be very bad if they have been kept in a balanced condition for 2,000 years, but suddenly they would vanish in a very short time." He cites another consideration: "For all Chinese people, he is our ancestor, and for what he did for China, we cannot unearth his tomb just because archaeologists or people doing tourism want to know what is buried there."

Funeral banner of Lady Dai (Xin Zhui). Han Dynasty, China. c. 180 B.C.E. Painted silk.

One of the best examples of Han painting comes from the tomb of the Lady of Dai, near the city of Changsha in Hunan south of the Yangzi River. The body of the lady, sealed within a multilayered coffin and robed in many layers of finely woven silks, was miraculously well preserved when the tomb was opened in 1972. The tomb is not a single deep pit, like the Shang burials, but a set of rooms resembling a dwelling. The painted T-shaped silk banner found in the innermost of the nested coffins may have been a personal name banner and symbol of the deceased around which the mourners assembled during the lady's funeral and the procession to the grave. In Han times, the Chinese believed that one part of the soul, the *po*, stayed with the body (as long as it was preserved and provided with ample offerings) while the other, the *hun*, underwent a long and perilous journey to paradise. The banner represents the lady within the Han conception of the cosmos.

The painted silk banner is a precious window into Han-dynasty legends and funeral practice; it was carried in front of the funeral procession, then draped upon her coffin. Banners like this were employed to attract the spirit of the deceased to its tomb, where it could be properly started on its afterlife journey instead of remaining on earth to bother the living. The banner's design is divided vertically into Yin (left), Mixture (center), and Yang (right); and horizontally into the three realms of Heaven, Earth, and the Underworld. The banner describes Lady Dai's journey to heaven; it is decorated with grave goods, spirits, legends, and symbols of immortality associated with Xiwangmu, the Queen Mother of the West.

The banner, one of the earliest surviving Han paintings, was executed in still well-preserved colors on a red field. Scholars generally agree that the scenes depicted represent the passage of the souls of the dead to the realm of the immortals. The search for immortality was of utmost concern during both the Qin and Han (206-220 CE) Dynasties, but this is the first work that illustrates visually, and quite literally, the route of the soul (or souls) in that quest. The banner charts that voyage. Two intertwined dragons loop through a circular jade piece known as a *bi*, itself usually a symbol of heaven, dividing this vertical segment into two areas. The portion above the *bi* represents the earthly realm. The lower portion represents the underworld.



heavenly realm

Lady Dai and
her attendants

body of Lady Dai
with mourners

underworld



The underworld, with water creatures and darkness, at the bottom represents the place below the surface of the earth where souls undergo their first metamorphosis. This is the place that the Daoists call the cosmic womb, where the yin symbol of female creation dwells. Above this watery realm two scenes are depicted taking place on earth; both describe mortals acting out their parts in mourning rites. The lower scene depicts a shaman, holy person, to the left and a group of attendees seated behind ritual vessels used at the sacrifices dedicated to honor ancestors. The duty of the shaman was to call back the soul from "below." The upper scene, set in the land of the immortals, describes the welcoming home of the soul. The large figure standing in profile in the center is thought to be a portrait of the deceased crossing to the "other" world.

The Land of the Immortals depicted at the top of the banner is inhabited by legendary subjects including Sun Crow, Moon Toad, and Celestial Dragon. The gatekeepers and the bell (the sound of which is thought to penetrate without bounds) are transitional images, standing between earth and heaven. The charting of space into registers corresponds to the structure of the cosmos and may even echo the geometric social order advocated by Confucius. Upon death, the path of the souls echoes the birth, life, and rebirth as embodied in the nature of ancestor worship already well established by the Shang Dynasty (c. 1550-1050 BCE).

Gold and jade crown. Three Kingdoms Period, Silla Kingdom, Korea. Fifth to sixth century C.E. Metalwork.

Gyeongju, the capital of the kingdoms of Old Silla (57 B.C.–676 A.D.) and Unified Silla (676–935), is dotted with impressive mounds of royal tombs. Their occupants range from kings, queens, and princes to relatives and nobility blessed into the inner circles of power. From the time of their construction, these tombs have stood as symbols of political authority and cultural grandeur. Some of the most prestigious tombs that have been excavated include Hwangnam-daechong, Geumgwan-chong (Tomb of Gold Crown), and Seobongchong from the fifth century, and Geumryeong-chong (Tomb of Gold Bell) and Cheonma-chong (Tomb of Heavenly Horse) from the sixth century. From the time of their construction, these tombs have stood as symbols of political authority and cultural grandeur.



For millennia, Silla tombs have preserved hoards of precious ornaments buried within. Constructed of wood, sealed with clay, and covered with mounds of stone and earth, these tombs have a relatively impenetrable structure. Chief among the treasures are accessories of pure gold: crowns, caps, belts, earrings, necklaces, bracelets, rings, and decorative swords. Besides



gold, there are also numerous ornaments fashioned from silver, gilt bronze, crystal, glass, beads, and jade. The elegant jewels were placed on the deceased, literally decorating the body. At least some of the objects were designed not for actual wear but as burial goods. For example, the magnificent gold crowns are very thin and fragile, with excessive (though attractive) trimmings. Similarly, gold earrings particularly ones with the fat and hollow top ring, are too impractical to be worn. Yet, practicality aside, the extraordinary

beauty and sophisticated craftsmanship of these personal ornaments attest to the esteem conferred upon these sumptuous riches by both patron and artisan.

Beyond objects of splendor, gold ornaments from Silla tombs also served as status symbols. Whereas gold earrings, necklaces, bracelets, and rings were appropriate accessories for both royalty and nobility, gold crowns and belts were reserved for the royal family. Furthermore, the objects' quality and design reflected the social and political rank of the deceased, so that a king's cache is indisputably more dazzling and complex than those of a royal kin or an aristocratic leader. To some degree, burial objects were also gender-coded. Decorative swords, for example, have been found only in the tombs of males. In general, however, many jewels, including elaborate earrings and necklaces, were made for members of both sexes.

The Silla elite's desire for gold ornaments originally arose from contacts with various kingdoms of China and with the nomadic cultures of the northeast. Gold, the raw material, initially was imported but eventually must have been produced within the Silla territories to satisfy the huge demand. Scythian gold ornaments make an intriguing and visually convincing precursor to Silla gold—witness the use of the ubiquitous tree-branch motif on their respective gold crowns. Exotic objects made in Central Asia and further west to the Mediterranean have been found in several Silla tombs, testimony to the vibrant international exchanges of the time. Close similarities between the gold ornaments and crystal and jade necklaces of Silla and Japan illustrate the deep ties shared by the elites of the two neighboring kingdoms and the eastern flow of artisans and goods.

The Silla practice of building large mound-tombs and interring scores of gold ornaments gradually declined following the official adoption of Buddhism as the state religion in 528. Instead, cremation became the standard postmortem practice. Accordingly, urns replaced jewelry as the main burial accoutrement. By the end of the sixth century, opulent ritual accessories made of gold and other precious metals were destined for Buddhist temples rather than royal tombs.

The Silla Crown

Made from thin sheets of gilded metal, cut and smoothed using a technique inherited from traditions deriving from the Steppe, this crown consists of a circular headband topped by five trident-shaped branches. Cut in symbolic fashion, these branches seem to evoke the branches of a tree, or the shape of a mountain, or even the wings of a bird. Two small golden chains, imitations of braids, hang from either side of the headpiece at the level of the ear. This type of tiara comes from the Silla kingdom (57 BCE-668 CE) and is more stylized and baroque than under the Paekche (18 BCE-660 CE) or Koguryo (37 BCE-668 CE) kingdoms. Stylistic influences are Siberian rather than Chinese. Such crowns have been most often discovered in tumulus-shaped tombs—often of impressive size—along with other

finery such as pendant earrings, brooches, belts, swords and, more rarely, shoes made from precious metals.

Occasionally the crowns were embellished with jade tiger fangs—closely associated with the shamanistic beliefs known to the Japanese *asmatama*—which symbolized power and hence royal authority. This extremely fragile headdress was worn by high-ranking figures on special occasions. It is believed to come from a tomb in Kyongsang province and dates from the "Three Kingdoms" period (1st century BCE–7th century CE). The Silla kingdom—together with the Koguryo and Paekche, the southernmost of the three sovereign kingdoms that made up Korea at the time—managed to preserve its traditions intact. It was less influenced by China than the Koguryo, and this crown is among the most characteristic specimens of gold and silverware treasures discovered there.

The Silla crown demonstrates cultural interactions between the Korean peninsula and the Eurasian steppe (thousands of miles of grassland that stretches from central Europe through Asia). Scytho-Siberian peoples of the Eurasian steppe created golden diadems similar to the Silla crown, such as a crown from Tillya Tepe (an archaeological site of six nomad graves that contained objects known as the "Bactrian Hoard") in modern-day Afghanistan. With five tree-shaped projections, flower ornaments and reflective discs, the Tillya Tepe crown can be compared with the natural imagery and radiant gold of the Silla crown. Though separated by many miles and by centuries, both crowns attest to shamanic beliefs prevalent among the nomadic cultures of the Eurasian steppe.



Angkor, the temple of Angkor Wat, and the city of Angkor Thom, Cambodia. Hindu, Angkor Dynasty. c. 800–1400 C.E. Stone masonry, sandstone.

Originally built as a Hindu temple dedicated to the god Vishnu, it was converted into a Buddhist temple in the 14th century, and statues of Buddha were added to its already rich artwork. Sometime later it was turned into a military fortification. Today it is a UNESCO World Heritage Site that scientists are struggling to preserve. Its 213-foot-tall (65 meters) central tower

is surrounded by four smaller towers and a series of enclosure walls, a layout that recreates the image of Mount Meru, a legendary place in Hindu mythology that is said to lie beyond the Himalayas and be the home of the gods.



Within the largest city in the world

The city where the temple was built, Angkor, is located in modern-day Cambodia and was once the capital of the Khmer Empire. This city contains hundreds of temples. The population may have been over 1 million people. It was easily the largest city in the world until the Industrial Revolution.

Angkor had an urban core that could easily have held 500,000 people and a vast hinterland that had many more inhabitants airborne laser scanning (lidar) research has shown. Researchers have also identified a "lost" city called Mahendraparvata, which is located about 25 miles (40 kilometers) north of Angkor Wat.

A moat, towers, spiral structure and hidden paintings

Angkor Wat itself is surrounded by a 650-foot-wide (200 m) moat that encompasses a perimeter of more than 3 miles (5 km). This moat is 13 feet deep (4 m) and would have helped stabilize the temple's foundation, preventing groundwater from rising too high or falling too low.

Angkor Wat's main entrance was to the west (a direction associated with Vishnu) across a stone causeway, with guardian lions marking the way. Recently, archaeologists found the remains of eight towers made of sandstone and laterite by the western gateway. These towers may be the remains of shrines that were in use before Angkor Wat was fully constructed. To the east of the temple was a second, more modest, entrance.

The heart of the temple was the central tower, entered by way of a steep staircase, a statue of Vishnu at top. This tower "was at once the symbolic center of the nation and the actual center where secular and sacred power joined forces," writes researcher Eleanor Mannikka in the book "Angkor: Celestial Temples of the Khmer Empire". "From that unparalleled space, Vishnu and the king ruled over the Khmer people."

A mile long sand structure containing a variety of spiral designs was recently discovered beside Angkor Wat by archaeologists using lidar. It would have existed for a brief period during the mid-to-late 12th century. Archaeologists are not certain what it was used for, and it's possible that the structure was never completed.

Carved Bas Reliefs of Hindu Narratives

There are 1,200 square meters of carved bas reliefs at Angkor Wat, representing eight different Hindu stories. Perhaps the most important narrative represented at Angkor Wat is the *Churning of the Ocean of Milk*(below), which depicts a story about the beginning of time and the creation of the universe. It is also a story about the victory of good over evil. In the story, *devas* (gods) are fighting the *asuras* (demons) in order reclaim order and power for the gods who have lost it. In order to reclaim peace and order, the elixir of life (*amrita*) needs to be released from the earth; however, the only way for the elixir to be released is for the gods and demons to first work together. To this end, both sides are aware that once the amrita is released there will be a battle to attain it.

The relief depicts the moment when the two sides are churning the ocean of milk. In the detail above you can see that the gods and demons are playing a sort of tug-of-war with the Naga or serpent king as their divine rope. The Naga is being spun on Mt. Mandara represented by

Vishnu (in the center). Several things happen while the churning of milk takes place. One event is that the foam from the churning produces *apsaras* or celestial maidens who are carved in relief throughout Angkor Wat (we see them here on either side of Vishnu, above the gods and demons). Once the elixir



is released, Indra (the Vedic god who is considered the king of all the gods) is seen descending from heaven to catch it and save the world from the destruction of the demons

Vishnu and the king

The builder of Angkor Wat was a king named Suryavarman II. A usurper, he came to power in his teenage years by killing his great uncle, Dharanindravarman I, while he was riding an elephant. An inscription says that Suryavarman killed the man "as Garuda [a mythical bird] on a mountain ledge would kill a serpent."

Suryavarman's bloodlust would continue into his rule; he launched attacks into Vietnam in an effort to gain control over the territory. He also made peaceful diplomatic advances, re-opening relations with China.

He venerated the god Vishnu, a deity often depicted as a protector, and installed a statue of the god in Angkor Wat's central tower. This devotion can also be seen in one of the most remarkable reliefs at Angkor Wat, located in the southeast of the temple. The relief shows a chapter in the Hindu story of creation known as the "churning of the sea of milk."

As archaeologist Michael Coe writes, the relief "describes how the *devas* (gods) and the *asuras* (demons) churned the ocean under the aegis of Vishnu, to produce the divine elixir of immortality". Scholars consider this relief to be one of the finest art pieces at Angkor Wat.

Suryavarman's devotion to Vishnu is also shown in the posthumous name he was given, "Paramavishnuloka" which, according to researcher H  l  ne Legendre-De Koninck, means "he who is in the supreme abode of Vishnu".

The building of temples by Khmer kings was a means of legitimizing their claim to political office and also to lay claim to the protection and powers of the gods. Hindu temples are not a place for religious congregation; instead, they are homes of the god. In order for a king to lay claim to his political office he had prove that the gods did not support his predecessors or his enemies. To this end, the king had to build the grandest temple/palace for the gods, one that proved to be more lavish than any previous temples. In doing so, the king could make visible his ability to harness the energy and resources to construct the temple, and assert that his temple was the only place that a god would consider residing in on earth.

Angkor Wat as Temple Mountain

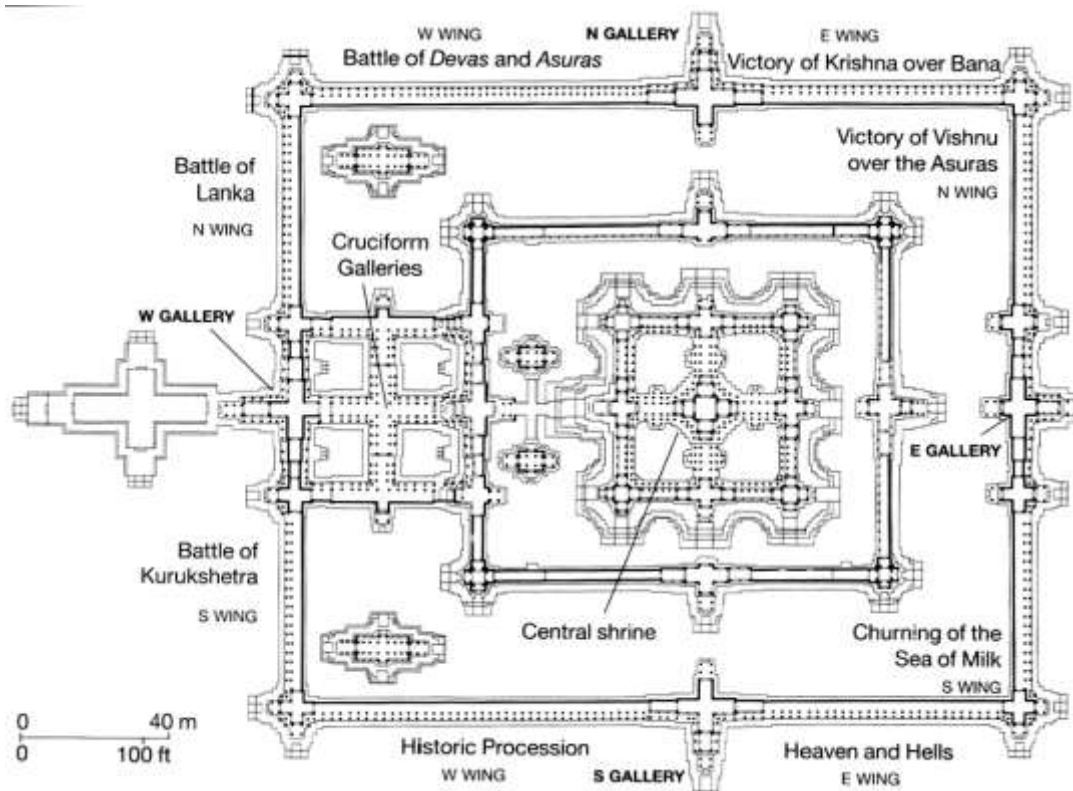
An aerial view of Angkor Wat demonstrates that the temple is made up of an expansive enclosure wall, which separates the sacred temple grounds from the protective moat that surrounds the entire complex (the moat is visible in the photograph at the top of the page). The temple proper is comprised of three galleries (a passageway running along the length of the temple) with a central sanctuary, marked by five stone towers.



The five stone towers are intended to mimic the five mountain ranges of Mt. Meru—the mythical home of the gods, for both Hindus and Buddhists. The temple mountain as an architectural design was invented in Southeast Asia. Southeast Asian architects quite literally envisioned temples dedicated to Hindu gods on earth as a representation of Mt. Meru. The galleries and the empty spaces that they created between one another and the moat are envisioned as the mountain ranges and oceans that surround Mt. Meru. Mt. Meru is not only

home to the gods, it is also considered an axis-mundi. An axis-mundi is a cosmic or world axis that connects heaven and earth.

In designing Angkor Wat in this way, King Suryavarman II and his architects intended for the temple to serve as the supreme abode for Vishnu. Similarly, the symbolism of Angkor Wat serving as an axis mundi was intended to demonstrate the Angkor Kingdom's and the king's central place in the universe. In addition to envisioning Angkor Wat as Mt. Meru on earth, the temple's architects, of whom we know nothing, also ingeniously designed the temple so that embedded in the temple's construction is a map of the cosmos (mandala) as well as a historical record of the temple's patron.



Angkor Wat as a Mandala

According to ancient Sanskrit and Khmer texts, religious monuments and specifically temples must be organized in such a way that they are in harmony with the universe, meaning that the temple should be planned according to the rising sun and moon, in addition to symbolizing the recurrent time sequences of the days, months and years. The central axis of these temples should also be aligned with the planets, thus connecting the structure to the cosmos so that temples become spiritual, political, cosmological, astronomical and geo-physical centers.

They are, in other words, intended to represent microcosms of the universe and are organized as mandalas—diagrams of the universe.

Construction techniques

Building Angkor Wat was an enormous undertaking that involved quarrying, careful artistic work and lots of digging. To create the moat around the temple, 1.5 million cubic meters (53 million cubic feet) of sand and silt were moved, a task that would have required thousands of people working at one time.

The buildings at Angkor Wat posed their own challenges. To support them a tough material called laterite was used, which in turn was encased with softer sandstone that was used for carving the reliefs. These sandstone blocks were quarried at the Kulen Hills, about 18 miles (30 km) to the north. A series of canals were used to transport the blocks to Angkor Wat, research shows.

Beneath the central tower was a shaft that leads to a chamber where, in 1934, archaeologists found "two pieces of crystal and two gold leaves far beneath where the Vishnu statue must have been," Coe writes, adding that deposits like these "spiritually 'energized' a temple, much as a battery will provide power to a portable electronic device."

Purpose

Although Angkor Wat is dedicated to Vishnu, the full purpose of the temple is still debated. One question is whether the ashes of Suryavarman II were interred in the monument, perhaps in the same chamber where the deposits were found. If that were the case it would give the temple a funerary meaning.

Eleanor Mannikka has noted that Angkor Wat is located at 13.41 degrees north in latitude and that the north-south axis of the central tower's chamber is 13.43 cubits long. This, Mannikka believes, is not an accident. "In the central sanctuary, Vishnu is not only placed at the latitude of Angkor Wat, he is also placed along the axis of the earth," she writes, pointing out that the Khmer knew the Earth was round.

In addition, in her writing, Mannikka notes a dozen lunar alignments with Angkor Wat's towers, suggesting that it served an important astronomical role. "During the long and clear Cambodian nights, when the stars filled every inch of the black sky, the astronomer-priests stood on the long western causeway ... and recorded the movements of the moon against the towers in the top two galleries of the temple."

Lakshmana temple, Khajuraho, Chhatarpur District, Madhya Pradesh, India, dedicated 954 C.E. (Chandella period), sandstone

Look closely at the image to the right. Imagine an elegant woman walks barefoot along a path accompanied by her attendant. She steps on a thorn and turns—adeptly bending her left leg, twisting her body, and arching her back—to point out the thorn and ask her attendant’s help in removing it. As she turns the viewer sees her face: it is round like the full moon with a slender nose, plump lips, arched eyebrows, and eyes shaped like lotus petals. While her right hand points to the thorn in her foot, her left hand raises in a gesture of reassurance. Images of beautiful women like this one from the northwest exterior wall of the Lakshmana Temple at Khajuraho in India have captivated viewers for centuries.



Depicting idealized female beauty was important for temple architecture and considered auspicious, even protective. Texts written for temple builders describe different “types” of women to include within a temple’s sculptural program, and emphasize their roles as symbols of fertility, growth, and prosperity. Additionally, images of loving couples known as *mithuna* (literally “the state of being a couple”) appear on the Lakshmana temple as symbols of divine union and *moksha*, the final release from *samsara* (the cycle of death and rebirth). The temples at Khajuraho, including the Lakshmana temple, have become famous for these amorous images. These erotic images were not intended to be titillating or provocative, but instead served ritual and symbolic function significant to the builders, patrons, and devotees of these captivating structures.

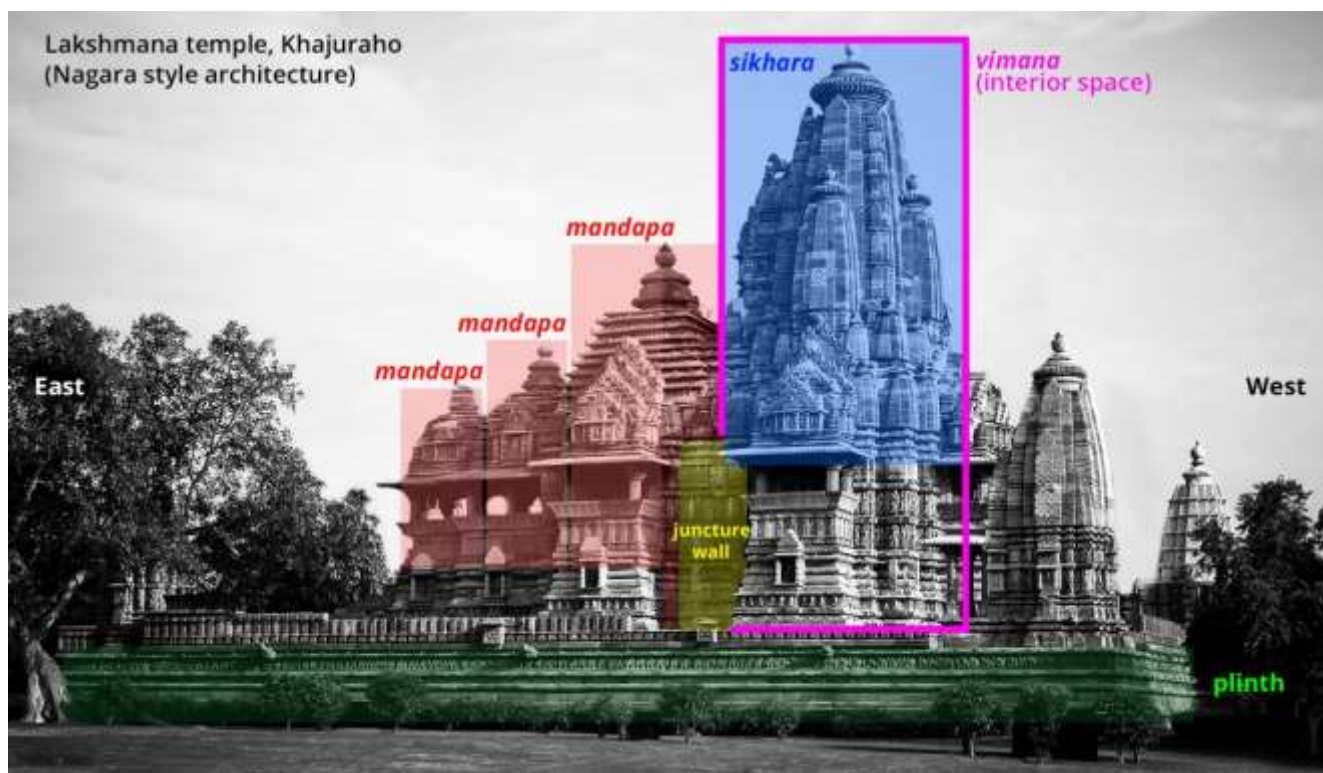


The Lakshmana temple was the first of several temples built by the Chandella kings in their newly-created capital of Khajuraho. Between the 10th and 13th centuries, the Chandellas patronized artists, poets, and performers, and built irrigation systems, palaces, and numerous temples out of sandstone. At one time over 80 temples existed at this site, including several Hindu temples dedicated to the gods Shiva, Vishnu, and Surya.[3] There were also temples built to honor the divine teachers of Jainism (an ancient Indian religion). Approximately 30 temples remain at Khajuraho today. The original patron of the Lakshmana temple was a leader of the Chandella clan, Yashovarman, who gained control over territories in the Bundelkhand region of central India that was once part of the larger Pratihara Dynasty. Yashovarman sought to build a temple to legitimize his rule over these territories, though he died before it was finished. His son Dhanga completed the work and dedicated the temple in 954 C.E.

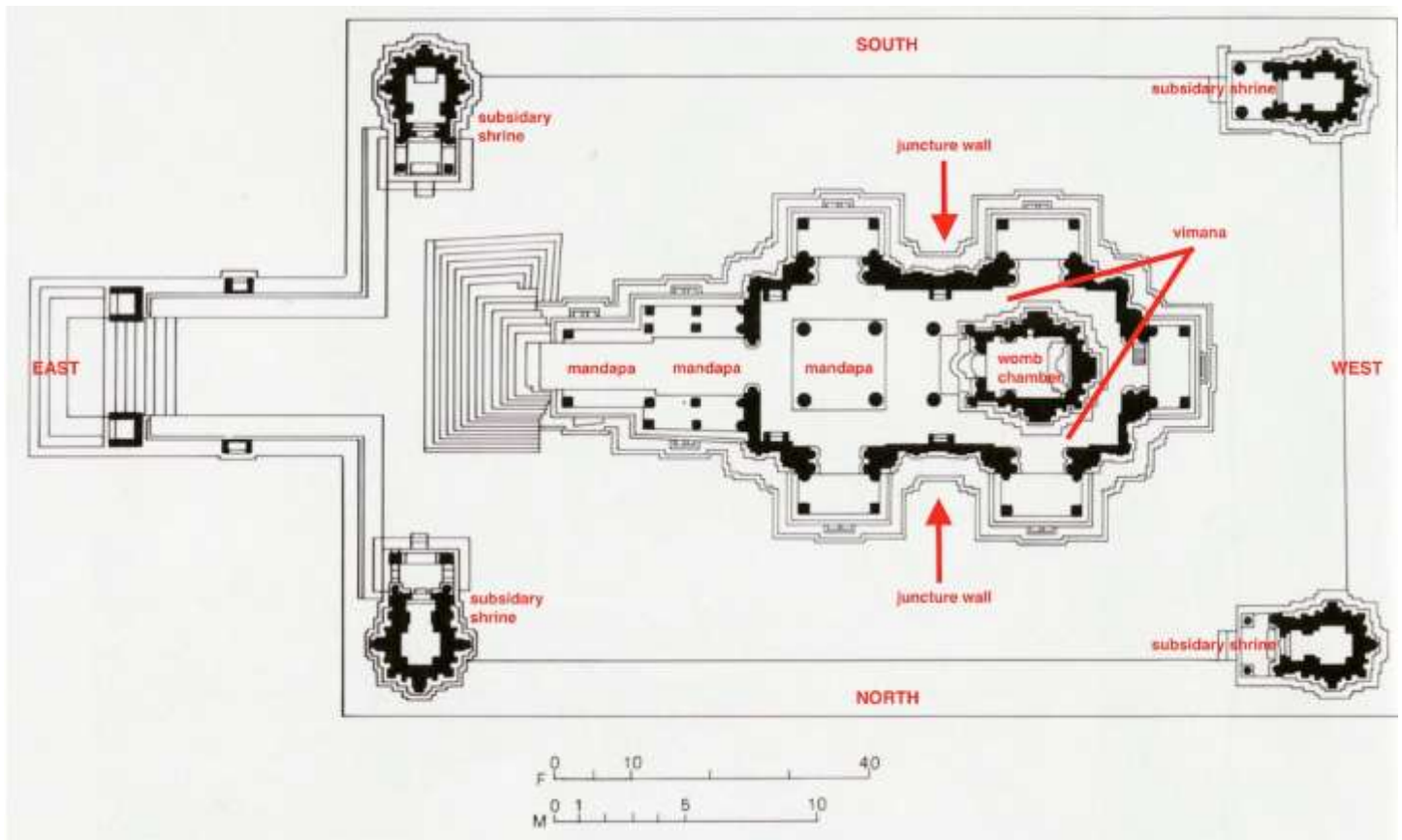




The central deity at the Lakshmana temple is an image of Vishnu in his three-headed form known as Vaikuntha who sits inside the temple's inner **womb chamber** also known as *garba griha* (above)—an architectural feature at the heart of all Hindu temples regardless of size or location. The womb chamber is the symbolic and physical core of the temple's shrine. It is dark, windowless, and designed for intimate, individualized worship of the divine—quite different from large congregational worshipping spaces that characterize many Christian churches and Muslim mosques.



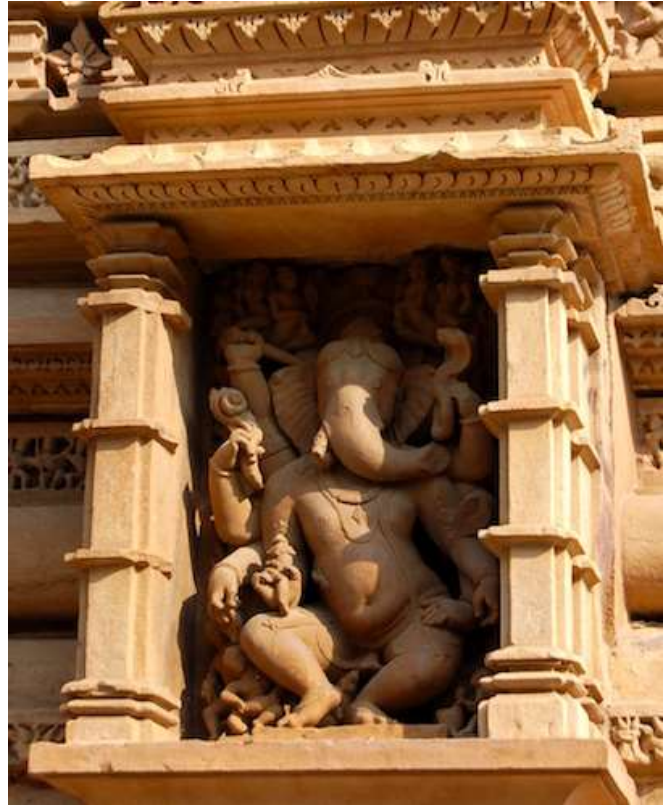
The Lakshmana Temple is an excellent example of Nagara style Hindu temple architecture. In its most basic form, a Nagara temple consists of a shrine known as *vimana* (essentially the shell of the womb chamber) and a flat-roofed entry porch known as *mandapa*. The shrine of Nagara temples include a base platform and a large superstructure known as *sikhara* (meaning mountain peak), which viewers can see from a distance. The Lakshmana temple's superstructure appear like the many rising peaks of a mountain range.



Devotees approach the Lakshmana temple from the east and walk around its entirety (circumambulation). They begin walking along the large plinth of the temple's base, moving in a clockwise direction starting from the left of the stairs. Sculpted friezes along the plinth depict images of daily life, love, and war and many recall historical events of the Chandella period.



Devotees then climb the stairs of the plinth, and encounter another set of images, including deities sculpted within niches on the exterior wall of the temple (view in Google Street View). In one niche (left) the elephant-headed Ganesha appears. His presence suggests that devotees are moving in the correct direction for circumambulation, as Ganesha is a god typically worshipped at the start of things. Other sculpted forms appear nearby in lively, active postures: swaying hips, bent arms, and tilted heads which create a dramatic “triple-bend” contrapposto pose, all carved in deep relief emphasizing their three-dimensionality. It is here —specifically on the exterior juncture wall between the *vimana* and the *mandapa* — where devotees encounter erotic images of couples embraced in sexual union.



This place of architectural juncture serves a symbolic function as the joining of the *vimana* and *mandapa*, accentuated by the depiction of “joined” couples. Four smaller, subsidiary shrines sit at each corner of the plinth. These shrines appear like miniature temples with their own *vimanas*, *sikharas*, *mandapas*, and womb chambers with images of deities, originally other forms or avatars of Vishnu. Following circumambulation of the exterior of the temple, devotees encounter three *mandapas*, which prepare them for entering the *vimana*. Each *mandapa* has a pyramidal-shaped roof that increases in size as devotees move from east to west.





Once devotees pass through the third and final *mandapa* they find an enclosed passage along the wall of the shrine, allowing them to circumambulate this sacred structure in a clockwise direction. The act of circumambulation, of moving around the various components of the temple, allow devotees to physically experience this sacred space and with it the body of the divine.

Shiva as Lord of Dance (Nataraja). Hindu; India (Tamil Nadu), Chola Dynasty. c. 11th century C.E. Cast bronze.

Hinduism, one of the world's great religions, is the belief system of 80 percent of the people of India. It is an ancient and complex system in which there are many levels of understanding. In the Hindu cosmos, time is conceived of as cyclical, rather than linear. The world is created and, after millennia, destroyed, only to be created once again. Most Hindus believe in divinity that is formless and all-powerful but may manifest itself in many different gods and goddesses in order to help people who need a deity to worship. For purposes of worship, a god can place his or her power in a visible form (for example, a statue). When that power is made manifest in humanized form, such images represent divine reality, rather than likenesses of earthly beings. The major Hindu deities are Shiva, Vishnu, and Devi (a goddess). The character of the deity Shiva is complex. He is known by many different names and has numerous manifestations. Shiva is worshiped in symbolic form (known as linga) for his progenerative powers. Although he is regarded as the cosmic destroyer, he is also a creator. Among his manifestations are Cosmic Dancer, creator and destroyer of the universe, wandering mendicant, and family man. He is full of paradoxes. He may be auspicious or inauspicious, male or female. He is all of these things, all opposites reconciled.

“The flaming circle in which he dances is the circle of creation and destruction. . . . The Lord holds in two of his hands the drum of creation and the fire of destruction. He displays his strength by crushing the bewildered demon underfoot. He shows his mercy by raising his palm to the worshiper in the “fear-not” gesture and, with another hand, by pointing at his upraised foot, where the worshiper may take refuge. It is a wild dance, for the coils of his ascetic’s hair are flying in both directions, and yet the facial countenance of the Lord is utterly peaceful and his limbs in complete balance.”



The words of religion scholar Diana Eck describe the Hindu god Shiva in one of his three incarnations: Nataraja, Lord of the Dance. This vision of Shiva first was made accessible to his worshipers through bronze sculptures created between the ninth and thirteenth centuries in southern India. The rulers were the Chola and their temples were the center of culture.

In early temples devoted to Shiva and Vishnu, stone images of the deities were enshrined in a sanctum off-limits except to those of the privileged classes—monarchs, priests, and Brahmin. In the sanctum the worshiper received grace by darshan, the act of seeing and being seen by the god. Those who could not go inside the temple were unable to receive grace.

According to scholar Vidya Dehejia, it was “around the sixth century that the deity began to assume a public persona not unlike that of a human monarch. The deity was required to appear in public and to preside over a number of festivities. The large, heavy stone image in the sanctum could not be carried to fulfill these functions, so the production of smaller and lighter processional images of deities began.” By the end of the eighth century, the images were being made in bronze.

The heyday of temple bronzes lasted four hundred years after the Cholas emerged as a significant ruling power around 850, when Vijayalaya Chola captured the town of Tanjavur and established a new line of monarchs. Under the Chola, bronze casting was perfected using the same lost-wax technique used today in India. The Cholas built enormous temples and commissioned hundreds of bronze deities that changed Hindu religious practice.

As portable bronze sculptures, the gods became accessible to the most lowly of worshipers. “Nandanar, one among the sixty-three saints of Shiva, was one such worshiper,” writes Dehejia. “He came from an untouchable community that provided leather for drums and animal gut for musical instruments used in the temples.” When he arrived from a pilgrimage to a famous temple, Nandanar was denied entry. As the story goes, Shiva commanded the priests to admit Nandanar into the sanctum where he disappeared under the raised foot of Shiva. “For the many devotees barred entry into the temple or stopped short of the main shrine, the portable image carried in procession through the streets of the town provided an outlet for joyous darshan.”

Large scale bronzes images like this sculpture were (and still are) generally intended for temples. Devotees would visit a temple to be in a space sacred to the deity. The god is understood to inhabit the sculpture and therefore worshipers treat the sculpture as they would a god. In the act of worship, devotees can see the god and the god can see the devotees. Worshipers bathe and perfume the god, dress the image in robes, and ornament it with jewelry and flowers. During festivals, the deity might be taken out and carried in processions.

Characteristics

Ring of Cosmic Fire: The oval ring around the figure of Shiva Nataraja represents the cosmic fire he uses to destroy the universe as part of the cycle of destruction and creation.

Shiva's third eye represents his cosmic knowledge. In one of the saint Sundarar's hymns to Shiva, he sings of Parvati (Uma), covering Shiva's two eyes in a flirtatious game, with the universe plunging into darkness as a result. To bring light back to the universe, Shiva created his third eye.

Earrings: On Shiva's right ear is an earring depicting a makara, a mythical water creature. His left ear is adorned with a circular earring worn by women. The pair represents Shiva's male and female aspects.

Multiple Arms: In art of the Hindu tradition, deities are depicted with multiple arms to illustrate divine power. Shiva Nataraja's four arms each take a different position or hold symbolic objects, showing his strength and constellation of skills.

Clothing: Shiva wears an article of clothing around his waist called a veshti in south India. This garment is also worn by Hindu priests. Across his torso is the sacred thread of the Brahmin priestly class.

Left Hand: The left hand points downward to indicate sanctuary for the soul of the devotee.

Right Hand: The open palm of Shiva's right hand forms the abhaya mudra, or hand gesture, signifying that the worshipper need have no fear.



Matted Locks (jatas): Matted locks or jatas are worn by religious ascetics. These locks reflect Shiva's role as a yogi who sometimes meditates for hundreds of years high in the Himalayan mountains. The lower half of Shiva's jatas fly out toward the halo of fire as he performs his dynamic dance.



Drum: It is with this hourglass-shaped damaru drum that Shiva beats a rhythm that brings the universe into creation. As both the creator and destroyer, Shiva and his drumming play an essential role in the cycle of the universe.

Ganga: The tiny figure perched in Shiva's hair is the River Ganga (Ganges) in the form of a goddess. In response to devastating drought, Ganga agreed to descend to Earth, where Shiva received her in his matted locks to soften the impact of her landing.



Snake: The story of Shiva's triumph in the forest near Chidambaram recounts the snake as one of the malicious forces hurled at the deity by the enraged sages of the forest. Shiva takes the snake and coils it around himself, thereby neutralizing it as a weapon.

Flame of Destruction: Poised in one of Shiva's hands is a flame of the cosmic fire he uses to end the universe in its cycle of creation and destruction.

Left Foot: Shiva's left foot is lifted as part of the "dance of bliss," raised in elegant strength across his body. Like a member of royalty, his ankles, arms, chest, and ears are adorned with jewelry.



Demon of Ignorance: The demon of ignorance is shown here pinned down tightly by Shiva's right foot. He looks blissfully up at the conquering Lord Shiva, despite his defeat. In the story of the Chidambaram forest, this demon was one of the weapons the sages launched against Shiva, who handily crushes the demon, thereby declaring his triumph over ignorance.

Lotus Base: The lotus flower, indigenous to South and Southeast Asia, represents purity in the Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist traditions. The flower grows from the depths of muddy water to emerge above its surface, pristinely beautiful. This pedestal is a double lotus, with petals pointing upward and downward.