



Plaque depicting Virabhadra and associated deities

Date
19th century

Medium
Brass

Description

The myths of Hinduism have engendered some of the most complex modes of pictorial storytelling in art. These stories involve a wide cast of characters, including the many gods of the Hindu pantheon and their numerous manifestations. This modern brass plaque portrays Virabhadra, a ferocious aspect of the deity Shiva. The hood of a snake shelters the adorned Virabhadra, whose jewelry, flowers, rich clothing, and multiple arms are typical of the iconography of Hindu gods and goddesses. Read counterclockwise, Virabhadra holds the damaru (a small two-headed drum) in his upper left hand, a trident in his upper right hand, and a sword and possibly a shield in his lower right and left hands, respectively. The presence of a crescent moon, the bull that is Shiva's vahana (vehicle), a linga (an iconic emblem of Shiva) in the top margin of the plaque, and the wooden clogs that

signify Shiva's distinction as an ascetic, further support the identification of the central figure as a manifestation of Shiva. The smaller figure to Virabhadra's right is likely Daksha, who was a priest and a minor deity. Daksha is identifiable from his goat head, which he received when he was resurrected following an encounter with Virabhadra in which he had been beheaded. The figure to Virabhadra's left may be identified as either the goddess Sati or Parvati. Sati was Shiva's consort at the time of his encounter as Virabhadra with Daksha. Sati would later be reborn as the goddess Parvati. Arathi Menon, Assistant Professor of Art History, Hamilton College, 2022 Terracotta and stone plaques featuring deities were created in India even before the Common Era. Although the function of such plaques is unknown, they likely served a votive function, perhaps at shrines, where they would have been presented in fulfillment of a vow or to accompany a prayer. This plaque is a more modern example, made from a mold, as terracotta examples would have been, but from brass rather than clay. Brass has long been used to create freestanding and relief sculptures in India: its production on the subcontinent dates to the late first millennium BCE, and the process of smelting zinc—the main ingredient, along with copper, in any brass alloy—is believed to have originated there. One benefit of using brass for such castings is that it resists corrosion. This plaque maintains the shape and compositional arrangement of the earlier prototypes on which it is based. (SOURCE: Alcauskas, INNOVATIVE APPROACHES, HONORED TRADITIONS, 2017)

Dimensions

Overall: 8 3/4 × 7 1/16 × 7/8 in. (22.2 × 17.9 × 2.2 cm)