

Plaque of a *Yakshī*

India, Bengal, 3rd-2nd century B.C.
Terra cotta

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Christian H. Aall, 1994
(7624.1)

Since clay is readily available and can be moulded into almost any shape, it is not surprising to find terra cotta objects were made in India from remote times. Ancient Indian ceramic artists fashioned clay to suit a variety of societal needs used by royalty and priests, merchants and ordinary people. Of particular importance were votive objects and moulded plaques which suited the religious and ritualistic needs of the people.

7624.1



Anonymous, India
Plaque with Female Figure
Sunga period, c. 2nd-1st century BC
Chandraketugarh, West Bengal, India
Molded earthenware; h 17.7 cm., w 15.2 cm.
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Christian H. Aall, 1994 (7624.1)

The Academy has recently been given a rare Indian earthenware plaque dating to the Sunga period (c. 2nd-1st century BC). This beautifully modeled clay plaque depicts a standing female figure of a type often seen in early Indian terracottas. These figures are classified as either *yakshis* (fertility goddesses) or aristocratic humans. The extraordinary naturalism of the Academy's figure is characteristic of the terracottas produced at Chandraketugarh in West Bengal, just north of modern Calcutta.

This partially nude figure wears a profusion of elaborate jewelry, and gazes at the viewer with a calm, confident expression. The most remarkable aspect of this figure is the decoration and ornamentation of the hair, which is piled high on the head in a chignon. The detailing in very low relief of the ornamental tassles

which hang from the carefully arranged hair is unusually refined. A border of small stamped flowers traces the perimeter of the plaque. The two holes at the top suggest that it was designed to be hung on a wall or in a shrine.

While different interpretations have been proposed for such figures, they are generally believed to represent

yakshis. The cult of the mother-goddess was widespread in early India, and similar terra-cotta plaques have been discovered over a wide area. The majority of this type, however, come from Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.

The Academy is deeply grateful to Mr. and Mrs. Christian H. Aall for donating this beautiful terra-cotta plaque to the museum's growing collection of Indian art. The plaque will be displayed in the Jhamandas Watumull Gallery of Indian Art when the Asian Galleries re-open in the late autumn.

Stephen Little
Curator of Asian Art

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