

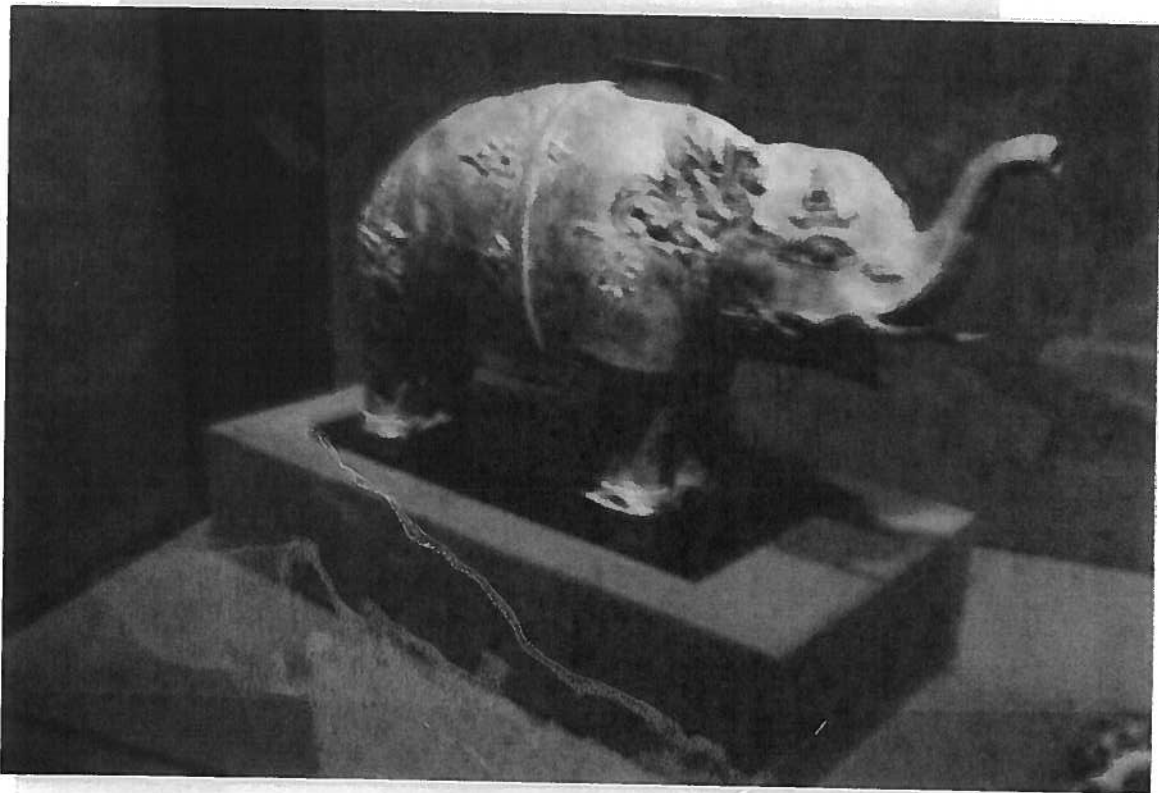
# Libation Vessel in the Form of an Elephant

Sumatra, 12th-13th century  
Bronze

Gift of The Christensen Fund, 2001  
(10623.1)

The exact ceremonial function of this libation vessel is unknown, as only two other examples of bronze elephants dating from this period are known, both are much smaller than our piece. The comparatively further greater number of extant terra cotta elephants emphasizes the rarity of this bronze example.

Indian inspired design elements are apparent on this remarkable late classical period libation vessel cast in the form of an elephant. Elaborate foliate motifs decorate the upturned ears and stylized parade appendages cast in relief on the head and other parts of the body. On each flank is an emblem depicting a small face within a complex configuration of foliate, tendril, and curvilinear motifs. The elephant is cast in two sections that join in the middle. The raised trunk serves as a spout for pouring. The legs stand on narrow rectangular plates which served to bind the vessel to a *palangki* or litter for service within a Hindu temple.



## ELEPHANT

A very remarkable libation vessel in the form of a male elephant. Cast in two halves, it joins around the middle : the "tongue" of the rear fitting beneath the raised rim of the front half. The forelegs were broken off in antiquity, but miraculously were never lost. But apart from this and some related fractures to casing underneath chin and hind legs, this charming sculpture is in an excellent state of preservation and without trace of bronze disease.

The flat tongue protrudes from slightly open mouth. The trunk is raised up and forward as a spout for pouring. The deep circular neck of filling aperture is set on back just rear of shoulders. The "young" tusks are depicted with naturalism. The large eyes are set in wide fleshly horizontal sockets and are very expressive. Brazed on above each are typically foliated parade appendages. The ears which are similarly brazed appendages are depicted covered in relief by elaborately stylized decorative motifs.

to solder with hard solder such as an alloy of copper + zinc  
Around the neck and cast in low relief is wide flat strap. Cast in low relief for display over head and parts of body, beside mouth, below ears and around the middle section ribs, and on the back, are typically stylized parade emblems. On each flank cast in relief is a emblem depicting a small face within a complex configuration of foliate, tendril and curvilinear motifs. A long plain tail hangs down hind quarters. Its male genitalia are depicted explicitly. Both fore and hind legs stand on narrow rectangular plates, which being longer than the animal's girth, served for binding the filled (and consequently unstable) sacred vessel to a "palangki" or litter for service within the temple.

Height 10 inches  
Length 18 inches

25,4 cms  
46 cms

Only two other bronze elephants dating from this period are known and both are quite small. One recovered very damaged from a river at Kampong Penjabeoegan, Mandabiling, Sumatra is in the National Museum, Jakarta. The other, a quite crude workmanship, was designed as an oil lamp with suspension chain. It is now in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

The design and execution of the tendril motifs are visible also on a small number of Mokko hour-glass bronze drums from Alor and Pantar.

Attributed to the 13th century, fragments of core material are being radiocarbon dated by the Isotope Measurement Laboratory, U.K.A.E.A., Harwell. An earlier date is however not at all out of the question.

The Linden Museum, Stuttgart, the Rijks Museum voor Volkenkunde, Leiden both possess large and vivaciously modelled terracotta elephant heads. Another smaller head illustrated in Muller is perhaps now the possession of the Christensen Fund ?

The comparatively greater number of extent terracottas emphasizes the rarity of this bronze exemple.

Results ?

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