

Moving Images

The lotus pedestal of this image of Shiva is positioned on top of a square base with two holes for attaching it to a frame for carrying during ceremonial processions. (Here the square base is recessed into the platform and not visible.) For such a procession, the image would have been decked with elaborate textiles, jewelry, and flowers.

In South Indian temples, major deities such as Shiva are represented by both a stone image in the central sanctuary and a bronze one that can be taken out in procession through the neighborhood. The stone image is understood to be rooted, immovable, and permanent. A bronze processional image, on the other hand, is mobile and dynamic, allowing the deity who resides in it to see and be seen by thousands of worshipers, and to interact with them.

The Hindu deity Shiva

1300–1500

India; Tamil Nadu state

Bronze

The Avery Brundage Collection, B69S14



Worshippers reverently parade a bronze image of Shiva around a South Indian temple, 1993. *John Guy.*



Holes in the square base, not visible as displayed.

Shiva and His Family

Nearby in this gallery are several other sculptures of Shiva, his family members, and a famous saintly follower of his.



Shiva as Bhairava



Shiva as divine teacher



Shiva revealed in the linga



Ganesha (son)



Skanda (son)



Sambandar (follower)

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The Hindu deity Ganesha

Approx. 1400–1600

India; Tamil Nadu state

Bronze

The Avery Brundage Collection,
B64B18

The amiable, elephant-headed Ganesha is a son, as is Skanda, of Shiva and Parvati. (The parents and Skanda can be seen in a nearby case.)

How Did Ganesha Get His

Elephant's Head? According to one account, Shiva disturbed his wife at her bath. She created a young boy to guard the door. Shiva was offended and sent soldiers, who cut off the boy's head. His wife was distraught, so Shiva replaced the boy's head with that of a passing elephant.

Ganesha here holds several of his most important symbolic implements. In his lower left hand is the dish of sweets he loves to feed on. In the lower right is a piece of his own tusk. He is said to have broken it off to use as a tool for copying

down the great epic Mahabharata when its author first recited it.



The poet-saint Sambandar

1200–1400

India; Tamil Nadu state

Bronze

The Avery Brundage Collection,
B60B1016

Hindu sculptures depict not only deities but also human beings elevated to saintly status. In the areas of Southern India where the Tamil language is spoken, one of the most important saints devoted to Shiva was Sambandar. Probably born around the year 600, Sambandar is said to have begun composing poems to Shiva and Parvati when he was a small child. Here he is shown as a child, dancing in devotion. Later, he made pilgrimages to important shrines to Shiva, composing more poems and singing them at each one. His poems were collected and continue to be sung in southern Indian temples today.

How Sambandar Became a Saint

When Sambandar was sixteen, his parents arranged for him to be married.

Sambandar was reluctant. At the end of the huge wedding ceremony the saint “sang his final hymn in which he begged the Lord Shiva to unite with him and thus liberate him from all earthly ties, including marriage. At these words, a great blaze of light enveloped the saint and his wife. At Sambandar’s command the entire assembly entered the flame and thus joined the saint in his final beatific union with his God.”*

*Adapted from Indira Viswanathan Peterson, *Poems to Siva: The Hymns of the Tamil Saints*, 1989.

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The Hindu deities Shiva and Parvati with their son Skanda

1500–1600

India; Ekambareshvara Temple, Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu state
Bronze

The Avery Brundage Collection, B60S157+

Many southern Indian images of Shiva, like this one, hold a battle-ax and a deer. “Hold” is perhaps not the right word: sometimes, especially in sculptures from later centuries, a deity’s symbolic implements appear not so much held as elegantly balanced on the tips of the fingers. The prongs on either side of the throne would have supported a horseshoe-shaped bronze halo (now lost) arching over the figures. The metal rings on the base suggest that this sculpture would have been carried in procession during important religious festivals.

A long Telugu-language inscription on the front of the throne tells the name of the donor (and his father and grandfather) and says that the sculpture was made for the Ekambareshvara Temple in the city of Kanchipuram. This temple was founded by the ruler of the south Indian kingdom of Vijayanagara in 1509.

Bronzes similar to this one, showing Shiva and his wife and son, had, by this period, been made for several centuries.



Ekambareshvara Temple, Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu state, India. *Ssiram mt, Wikimedia Commons.*

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