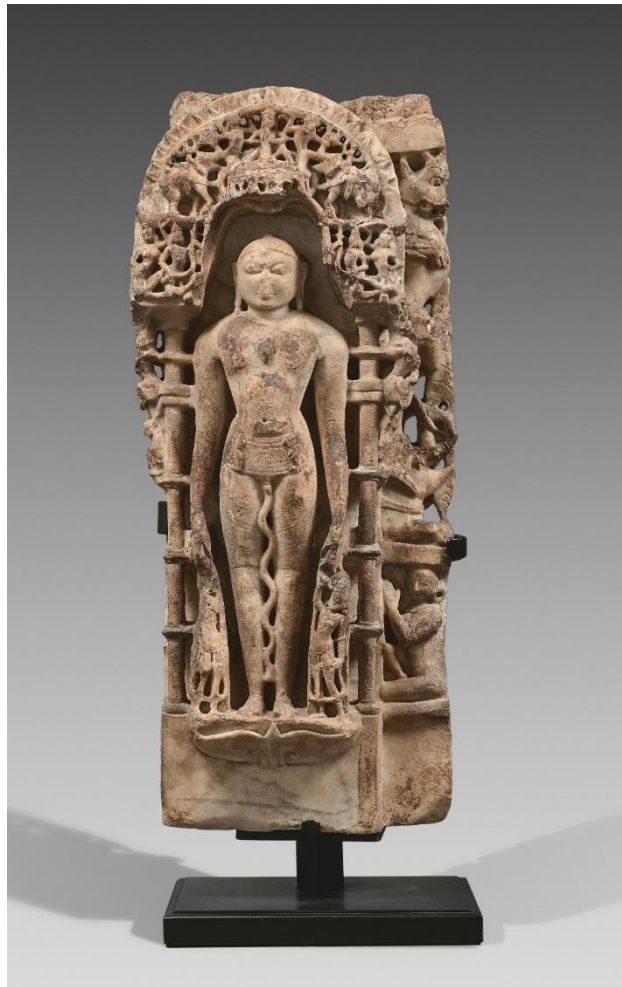


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Ajitanātha (P584)



What do we like in this sculpture?

- The figure of Ajitanātha, the second of the twenty-four Tirthankara or Jina, omniscient beings who have broken free from the cycle of reincarnation. His name means "invincible", he is the one who has never succumbed to material comforts or temptations.
- The assembly that surrounds the Jina: both divine and protective, dynamic and varied.
- The skillful contrast between the parts teeming with details and the much calmer and purer aspect of the divinity.
- The openwork sculpted in high relief, carved behind each element and creating a real stone lace!

I. Detailed description

Ajitanātha (P584)

White marble

Western India, Gujarāt

11th-12th century

H. 77 cm or 30 3/8 in

Jainism, an Indian religion predating Buddhism

Jain sanctuaries have countless depictions of the Tirthaṅkara, also called Jina, omniscient beings who have broken free from the cycle of reincarnation. These extraordinary characters, of which there are twenty-four, existed down through the ages and are responsible for transmitting the foundations of Jain doctrine through the centuries. This doctrine predates Buddhism and one of its fundamental principles is non-violence (*ahimsā*), which applies to all creatures. This impressive stele represents Ajitanātha, the second of the twenty-four Jina.

Ajitanātha, the invincible master

Ajitanātha means "invincible", he is the one who "never succumbed to material comforts or temptations, and was never defeated by heretics" (see Norton Simon Museum, notice M.1998.1.S). He stands in a pose that is proper to Jainism, called "*kāyotsarga*": standing with his arms stretched out along his body, without touching it. The *śrīvatsa*, an auspicious symbol, is carved in the middle of his chest. Because he wears clothing, this Jina can be associated with the Jain order called *Śvetāmbara*. Under his feet, engraved on the base, we recognize his symbol, an elephant.

Divine Assembly

In the upper part, two elephants anoint the goddess Mahālakṣmī, also called Śrī, shown in the centre. They honoured Ajitanātha in the same way. This iconography refers to the *abhiṣeka* of Śrī, a devotional activity consisting in bringing blessing through the pouring of sacred water. This is a particularly auspicious theme common to Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. In the register directly below, the figuration of *vidyādhara* and *gāndharva* reinforces the positive character of the scene. Holding a lotus flower here, the *vidyādhara* are beings with magical powers living in a wonderful world and celebrating the deities by throwing them jewels or garlands. Their consorts make a gesture of approval with their right hand and were probably holding a *vīṇā*, an Indian musical instrument. They could therefore be two *gāndharvī*, celestial musicians beings. On either side of the Jina at his feet, two divine attendants accompany him, while a donor sits on his left as a prayer. In the register above, a majestic leogryph evokes the uprights of the divine thrones.

Jainism, a popular religion in Western India

The piece is characteristic of the medieval period in Gujarāt, in Western India, and its decorative refinement is quite remarkable. The side columns give a lot of elegance as does the lotus of the base, and the openwork is exceptional. In medieval times, Jain sculptors preferred white marble over all other stone because of its pure color. This is demonstrated by the many vast temples built on hilltops, as a destination for pilgrimage, such as Pārśvanātha in Gujarāt or Ranakpur and Mount Ābū in Rājasthān.

II. Image of the piece – front view



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III. Image of the piece - left three-quarter view



IV. Images of the piece – views of details



To the decorative profusion responds this empty space surrounding the Jina, arranged to focus on Ajitanātha. The apparent simplicity or purity of the deity also contributes to this visual balance. Every detail, every openwork, all underlined in the upper part by this succession of both geometric and floral patterns, contribute to the teeming dynamism of the participants of the sacred assembly (*samavasaraṇa*) who listen and protect the Jina.



Beneath the pure and elegant lotus of the base, appears engraved the symbol of Ajitanātha, the elephant.

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The incredible depth of the sculpture is perfectly perceptible here. Sculpted in high relief, an openwork has been carved behind each element creating a real stone lace! The light goes between the legs of the leogryph, and digs the shadows created by the columns. The volumes are impressive: the alcove is almost 8 cm (or 3 ½ in) deep.

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V. A visual explanation

AJITANĀTHA

His name means "the invincible", he is the one who never succumbed to material comforts and temptations and was never defeated by heretics. Ajitanātha is the second of the twenty-four Tīrthaṅkara (also called Jina). These omniscient beings who have broken free from the cycle of reincarnations come from Jainism, a doctrine that predates Buddhism.



VI. Provenance: in all transparency!

- . This piece comes from a private collection in Luxembourg, formed from the 1980s.
- . We are always very cautious and diligent about the provenance of the artworks we offer. Ensuring the seriousness and reliability of the information given by the former owners is one of our priorities and we then guarantee this origin by engaging our responsibility.
- . In order to reinforce this guarantee, we systematically verify that these artworks have not been registered as missing or stolen. As Interpol has granted us the right to directly consult their database of stolen or reported items, we verify by ourselves and issue a certificate attesting to this.

VII. Condition report: our scientific approach

This Jain stele is made of marble, dated from the 11th-12th century and measures 77 cm high or 30 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. The sculpture has been carved in high relief and all the details present a polished surface, created by the erosion and wear all over the centuries that has rounded off the protruding parts. The block of stone has been reduced more on the left than on the right and this explains the loss of the leogryphal pattern on the right proper shoulder of the Jina, symmetrical to the better preserved one on the other side. The second most obvious loss is the bust of the small assistant at the feet of the Jina, to his proper left. All of the losses and asperities of the carved surface so as this wear are not surprising given the age of the work and the known fragility of the most protruding parts (such as the nose of the Jina for example). The background of the stele in front of which the main deity stands has been patiently polished as indicated by the smooth surface. Same can be said of the base of the stele. The sculpted surface of the piece bears a hard layer of deposits, due to the agglomeration of minerals. This epidermis gives the marble this dark colored patina, the density of which depends on the degree of incrustation. No restoration was evidenced.

Please note that since we are not conservators or restorers, it must be understood that any condition report we made is a subjective qualified opinion, even if we do our best efforts. Prospective buyers should inspect the piece to satisfy themselves as to condition.

VIII. Comparable museum artwork – Norton Simon Museum

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Art (/art/) / Jina Ajitanatha and His Divine Assembly

Jina Ajitanatha and His Divine Assembly

Place Made: India: Gujarat

Date: 1062

Medium: White marble with traces of pigment

Dimensions: 59 x 20 x 6 in. (149.9 x 50.8 x 15.2 cm)

Credit Line: Norton Simon Art Foundation, Gift of Jennifer Jones
Simon

Accession Number: M.1998.1.S

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NOT ON VIEW



IX. Our guarantees: for a serene acquisition!

- More photos will be sent to you on request.
- In case of purchase, we will establish an invoice that you can pay by bank transfer.
- You will receive our certificate of authenticity with the photo of the artwork, its detailed description and the mention of the provenance.
- We will define together the shipping modalities and we will take care of all customs formalities if you live outside of France.
- If you do not like the piece, we give you the possibility to return it to us and we will assist you with the resulting terms and conditions.