

Galerie Hioco

The goddess Śuciṣmatī and her son Gr̥hapati (P683)



What do we like in this sculpture?

- Its fascinating sensuality! There is a great sense of elegance, a refinement of curves and lines that can be admired.
- Its beneficial and touching iconography: an image of motherhood placed under the blessing of the great god Śiva.
- Its originality: a rare subject expressed in an unexpected horizontal format. An extremely decorative work!

I. Detailed description

The goddess Śuciṣmatī and her son Gṛhapati (P683)

Black stone

Northeast India (Bihār, Bengal)

11th-12th century, Pāla period (8th-12th century)

H. 24 cm; L. 57 cm or H. 9 ½ in; L. 22 ¾ in

A most sensual image

Highly original and beautifully carved, this rare stele depicts the goddess Śuciṣmatī, nonchalantly reclining on her left flank, her head supported by one hand and having one of her feet massaged by one of her attendants. Her languid posture and generously shaped body, consistent with the Indian canon of beauty, are fascinatingly sensual. The whole figure of the goddess, dressed in a fine pleated dhotī, offers a particularly harmonious set of undulating curves, enhanced by ornaments of obvious richness. Sophisticated tiara, heavy earrings, large bracelets on the wrists, arms and ankles, voluminous necklace and elaborate belt: all these typically Indian jewels adorn the goddess in the most beautiful way. As for the details and the care taken in the carving work, one must first look at the very well preserved face, whose graphic and accentuated lines are characteristic of Pāla works, but also admire the extremely tangible modelling of the goddess's abdomen.

Śuciṣmatī and Gṛhapati: an artwork related to the great Hindu god Śiva

This identification of the goddess Śuciṣmatī is of course possible by comparison with similar works preserved in museums (in Calcutta in particular), but above all thanks to the presence of her son, Gṛhapati, the infant who lay against the goddess's breast and of whom only a spall remains today.

The legend from the Śiva Purāṇa tells that Śuciṣmatī and her husband, the sage Viśvānara, were unable to have a child. Seeing his wife's desolation, Viśvānara went on a pilgrimage to Kāśī to pray to Śiva. The god appeared to him and promised him an offspring. Soon after, Śuciṣmatī gave birth to Gṛhapati. The importance of the god Śiva is also recalled by the presence, in the upper part of the stele, of his sons Gaṇeśa, the elephant-headed god, and Skanda, the eternally handsome young warrior, as well as of the liṅgaṃ, a phallic symbol of the god, linked to fertility and to his omnipotence.

A popular iconography in medieval Northeast India

This image of Śuciṣmatī, close to her child, refers to motherhood. It is an iconography that was popular in Bengal between the tenth and twelfth centuries, during the reign of the great Pāla rulers. Such stelae were most likely commissioned and worshipped by women wishing to have children (see Pal, *Indian Sculpture*, Los Angeles, 1998, p. 93). The female figure in the lower register, seated in front of a fire altar and offering bowls, likely represents one such female donor.

II. Image of the piece – front view



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



IV. Image of the piece – back view



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V. Image of the piece – right three-quarter view



VI. Provenance: in all transparency!

- . This piece comes from the collection of a Japanese diplomat who acquired it in Bangladesh in the 1970s.
- . 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 stele is made of black stone, dated to the 11th-12th century approximately and measures 57 cm long and 24 cm high (or H. 9 ½ in; L. 22 ¾ in). The reliefs and details are well preserved even if some missing parts on the surface are evident. The forearm and right hand of the goddess are missing, as is part of her right leg. The left breast and left hand are fragmentary. The infant is missing and the bed frame is spalled. Only small and rare asperities are visible on the rest of the surface of the sculpture (the tip of the goddess's nose for example). No restoration has been detected.

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.

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IX. Comparable artwork – Indian Museum, Calcutta

A stele depicting the goddess Śuciṣmatī and her son Grhapati, kept at the Indian Museum in Calcutta.



X. 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.