

A BUDDHIST IMAGE FROM KARITUNAN SITE,
BATANGÁS PROVINCE

by JUAN R. FRANCISCO

(With Four Plates)

A RECENT VERY SIGNIFICANT DISCOVERY IN PHILIPPINE ARCHAEOLOGY is a clay medallion with an image in bas relief. It was excavated from a test square in a habitation area of Karitunan site, municipality of Calatagan, Batangas. The test excavation ran to a depth of 60 centimeters through midden material. The discovery was made in Summer, 1961. The site had been dated, together with at least 20 sites dotting the shoreline of Calatagan, in the late 14th and early 15th centuries A.D.

Associated with this medallion are an appreciable number of native earthenwares and trade porcelains. The porcelain (and stoneware) are a mixture of Chinese (early Ming and some older heirloom pieces), Siamese (Sawankhalok) and Annamese provenance.

The medallion is semi-oblong in form, measuring 2.6 inches in height, and 1.9 inches in width. Compared with the native pottery excavated in the same site, Karitunan, the clay used in the *manufacture* of the medallion appears to show characteristics of the clay used in this native pottery. While a comparison has also been made with the broken Sawankhalok and Annamese pottery, the clay of the medallion showed less or no affinity with that of the Siamese and Annamese ware material.

It may be postulated that the medallion is of local manufacture. Judging from the unfinished appearance of the reverse side of the object, it may have been fired before the image was given its finishing touches, if its appearance, per se, were considered as a criterion. This reverse face shows fingermarks, which may have been made in the process of manufacture. Signs of disintegration, apart from the unfinished appearance, may suggest that the medallion was relatively not well-fired.

There are certain marks on the obverse face of the object that may suggest that a mould (cast?) had been used in the manufacture, although the unfinished appearance suggests more definitely that the object could

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have been fashioned out directly from a model. The fingermarks may also suggest that they were impressed by pressure upon being stamped on the supposed mould (cast?).

If the artist fashioned the medallion, either directly or by means of a mould (or cast?), from a model, it may be fair to suggest that it is intrusive into the whole culture pattern-character of the site. The carriers of the trade-wares, with which the medallion was associated, may have possessed such a model, from which our object was copied. That it may have been carried as an "amulet" is fairly certain; and may have been used as an object of worship. In which case the carrier may have been a Buddhist, or a least one who was inclined towards the Buddhist religion and practice, or one who carried it as an ornament without knowing its actual votive significance.

The Image. IN A PAPER BY THE PRESENT WRITER, THE IMAGE WAS described and identified

as a *Hari-Hara* (Siva-Visnu, which is Hinduistic) figure of either the Cambodian or Cham type. But it may turn out to be the Siamese *Padmapani*, which is Buddhistic, for there appears to be traces of the lotus (padma) held by the right hand (pani) with its stem projecting down the foot of the image.¹

The image is in the *tribhanga* (three bends) posture.

The *tribhanga* posture is confirmed to be non-characteristic of all Visnu images, and the same can be said of Buddha icons (as well as Hari-Hara) except in the Jataka scenes.² However, Siva (also his consort, Parvati) is sometimes in slight *tribhanga*, while Rama (and Sita) is one of the divinities which is mostly found in the real *tribhanga* pose.³ The Devis⁴ are almost always represented in *tribhanga*.⁵

¹"Sri Vijaya and the Philippines: A Review," paper presented to the All-India Oriental Conference, XXIst Session, October 12-14, 1961, Kashmir, India, in *Philippine Social Sciences and Humanities Review*, XXVI, March 1961, (No. 1), p. 87-109.

²Confirmation letter from the Institut Francais d'Indology, Pondicherry, India, dated 7 December, 1961. "...enclosed herewith three photographs representative of the *tribhanga* pose. Mr. Pattabiramin has indicated on the reverse side the sites and names of the divinities. He brings to your notice that in Indian art Visnu is never in *tribhanga* pose—the same can be said of Buddha's images (as well as of Hari-Hara) except in Jataka scenes.

"Siva is sometimes in slight *tribhanga*. Rama is one of the divinities which is mostly found in the real *tribhanga* pose."

"The Devis are almost always represented in *tribhanga*."

The letter is signed by Mlle. S. Siauve, Secretary of the Institute.

³ *ibid.*

⁴The name Devi is a generic name for Hindu goddesses, whether she is a consort of a god or not. But specifically, Devi, as consort of Siva, is the great goddess known variously as Sati, Uma, Parvati, Durga, Kali. *Vide* Heinrich Zimmer, *The Art of Indian Asia*, Vol. I (Bolinggen Series XXXIX. New York: Pantheon Books, 1955), p. 141.

⁵ *op. cit.*

Compare the Philippine image with the Nepalese bronze Avalokitesvara-Padmampani statue, now on display at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. "The Bodhisattva here shows himself quietly . . . in a posture called "three bends" (*tribhanga*), in which the head, the torso, and legs slant in contrary directions: the legs and hips to the right, the trunk to the left, and the neck and head then gently to the right."⁶

In a letter by M. P. Z. Pattabiramin, the image is confirmed to be "Padmampani en pose de tribhanga."⁷ With this confirmation, the present author's first alternative identification (that is, "the Hari-Hara . . . of either Cambodian or Cham type . . .," may now be dismissed, and confine the discussion on the second alternative, which has been confirmed in the same letter mentioned above (to be referred to subsequently as PL-1) and in another letter (PL-2) by the same distinguished archaeologist.⁸

The second alternative is that "it may turn out to be the Siamese *Padmampani*, which is Buddhistic, for there appears to be traces of the lotus (*padma*) held by the right hand (*pani*) with its stem projecting down the foot of the image . . ." The first part of the alternative is confirmed as *Padmampani*, which M. Pattabiramin identifies to represent the Avalokitesvara⁹ in the *Padmampani* form (PL-1).¹⁰ But the second must be dismissed here as we have an authoritative identification of the image as a whole on the basis of the comparisons made by our correspondent.

DESPITE THE RATHER DISINTEGRATED NATURE OF THE IMAGE, the following are the results of M. Pattabiramin's comparison of the photographs that were sent to him with those found in India and Further India. Apart from its identification as Avalokitesvara in the *Padmampani* form, the god or deity, more specifically Bodhisattva, is in his human aspect, for he is

⁶ Zimmer, I, p. 185; II, Plate 600.

⁷ M. Pattabiramin is Chief of the Archaeological Section of the Public Library of Pondicherry, attached to the Institut Francais d'Indologie, Pondicherry. His letter is dated 23 March 1962. (PL-1)

⁸ Dated Pondicherry, 13 April 1962. (PL-2)

⁹ "The Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara is known also as *Padmampani*, 'Lotus-in-hand,' a lotus flower on a long stem being usually held-in his left hand. He is generally supported by a lotus pedestal . . ." (Zimmer, I, p. 181.) He ". . . is a personification of perfect compassion and indifference (two at once), exceeding—if possible—even the attitude of the Buddhas. In his legend we are told that out of compassion for the countless myriads of creatures, he renounced with a solemn vow the attainment of Buddhahood and final extinction, so that he might continue preaching the Buddhist doctrine until the last being was brought to enlightenment and thus released from the round-of-re-birth. Avalokitesvara is 'the being who is capable (*isvara*) of enlightening insight (*avalokita*)', but, who, out of infinite mercy, postponed his own attainment of nirvana." (Zimmer, I, p. 182.)

¹⁰ *Vide* Alice Getty, *The Gods of Northern Buddhism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928), Table IV, p. 55. *Vide* excerpt of this Table in the Appendix of the present paper.

represented with only two arms. The left hand holds a vase in the form of a lotus, and the right hand is in the *varada mudra*.¹¹ Compare this image with a Nepalese bronze Avalokitesvara-Padmapani statue. The right hand is in the posture known as "granting gifts" (*varada mudra*), while the left holds a lotus (the part of the stalk passing through the fingers having disappeared).¹²

The head is "topped with a head-dress which looks like a sort of an oval aureole, within which is the image of Amitabha."¹³ This resembles the Buddhist art of Burma or Siam (PL-2). M. Pattabiramin writes further:

Très fréquemment on trouve dans l'Inde les statues de Buddha avec l'Amitabha une sorte d'auréole oval figurant autour de la tête. Par exemple la statue de Buddha avec Amitabha qui se trouve à Arikamedu est appelée Birmankovil c'est à dire provenant de Birmanie. (*ibid.*)

Compare this iconographic trait with that found on the head-dress of a stone and a bronze Lokeshvara statues from South Siam. Both images have head-dresses which are oval in form, within each is found the image of the Buddha Amitabha.¹⁴

It is not the purpose of the present paper to discuss the iconographic significance of the Amitabha in the oval aureole of either our image or the Buddha. Hence, we may reserve its discussion for a later paper, as, presently, materials for this purpose are inadequate in the libraries in the Philippines—for that matter in Manila and in Quezon City.

The image judging from the iconographic traits belongs to the 12th or 13th century A.D. Siamese art. It is interesting to note that it was excavated in a decidedly 14th-15th century A.D. site.¹⁵ The distance in time between the art's early development in Siam and its emergence in Calatagan is understood only if we take a broad view of the trading time taken between commercial centres during those times. It may be said that the image arrived at Calatagan around the middle of the 14th century A.D. It is certain that it could not have arrived except with traders, perhaps porcelain traders, judging from its associations with this kind of wares.

¹¹ *varada mudra* is a gift-bestowing gesture, "the gesture (mudra) that bestows (da) a wish or a boon (vara)." (Zimmer, I, p. 165.)

¹² Zimmer, I, p. 185; II, Plate 600.

¹³ Amitabha is the Buddha of "infinite and immeasurable (amita) enlightening splendour (abha)". (Zimmer, I, p. 204, *passim*.) His image is found upon the head-dress of Bodhisattvas, e.g., Avalokitesvara-Padmapani or even the Buddha, is a symbol of his being the source of infinite wisdom. He is the teacher and guardian of the Bodhisattvas.

¹⁴ Vide Reginald Le May, *A Concise History of Buddhist Art in Siam* (Cambridge: University Press, 1938). Illustration Nos. 43,44.

¹⁵ Vide Robert B. Fox, "The Calatagan Excavations," *Philippine Studies*, VIII, 3, August, 1959.

It was noted earlier (*vide supra*) that the image may have been copied from a model. It may be postulated further that the model from which the image was copied certainly came earlier than the date of the site (being already primarily burial in nature), and that it could have been carried around, in spite of its rather unfinished appearance, as an "amulet," like its model, which as it has been commented upon may have been also one. It may have belonged to a trader, perhaps a porcelain trader. If he possessed an "amulet" which became the model of the medallion, it may have been also used by him who had copied it and his heirs for at least 50-75 years, before it was made part of its owner's grave furniture. The medallion's very much disintegrated obverse face may account for its long years under ground, till its excavation in Summer, 1961.

It may even be suggested that the original (medallion?) may have been left as a gift by the trader-owner. It is certain that the recipient of such a gift may have used it also as an "amulet" for sometime; and that clay copies of such an object may have been made. It is, therefore, not without basis to postulate that if there really existed a model left in Calatagan, and copies of which were made, more extensive and intensive excavations of the Calatagan sites may yield such original (medallions?) and perhaps other clay copies. It would not be surprising if the original (medallion?) turns out to be made of metal, perhaps bronze, or some other metal.

WHILE THE PRESENT IMAGE, TOGETHER WITH THE AGUSAN TARA STATUE¹⁶ and the Mactan Avalokitesvara icon¹⁷ may show interesting evidences of the "extent" of Mahayana Buddhist expansion in the East,¹⁸ it may not necessarily exhibit the permeation of Philippine culture by the Buddhist cultural orientation. It only gives us a minimal idea of the Indian Buddhist incursion in the Islands—but not one that would have to be reckoned with in the present cultural orientation of the Filipino people. Unlike the influence on the language and literature of the Indian Hindu upon early Philippine cultural life,¹⁹ the influence of Buddhistic material and/or even the intangible culture is comparatively nil. Searching the whole Philippine canvas of culture life, we find no more than what we have men-

¹⁶ *Vide* Juan R. Francisco, "The Golden Image from Agusan: A New Identification" (also published in this volume).

¹⁷ *Vide* John Carroll, "The Word Bisaya in the Philippines and Borneo," *Sarawak Museum Journal*, IX, 15-16 (n.s.), 1960, fn. 14.

¹⁸ It is interesting to note that Mahayanistic Buddhism seems to have penetrated deep into the East and South-East Asian culture much earlier (and more extensively?) than Hinayanistic Buddhism. *Vide* P. V. Bapat, *2500 Years of Buddhism*. New Delhi, 1959.

¹⁹ *Vide* Juan R. Francisco, *Indian Influences in the Philippines (With Special Reference to Language and Literature)*. Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Madras, India, August, 1963.

tioned above regarding the material evidence, and perhaps nothing of the intangible.

Perhaps, the only significance that may be attributed to the image is its association with the Sawankhalok porcelains. This may explain in one way or another the early relations of the Islands with the Siamese peoples, although it may possibly be indirect, if in the long run it may be proved that the image and/or the porcelain wares were brought to the Islands via the intervention of trade entrepreneurs. Indeed, it may be certain that whether these artifacts were brought directly or indirectly, they have a lasting place in the whole historico-cultural perspective of the Filipino people.

In résumé, the definite identity of the image may now be laid down. It is a Mahayanistic Buddhist image, the Boddhisattva Avalokitesvara in the Padmapani form, with the Buddha Amitabha represented in the oval nimbus of the image. Other Buddhistic iconographic characteristics confirm the image's identity and its affinity with similar Buddhist sculptures in Siam (India and Nepal). This affinity is proved further by its association with the Siamese (Sawankhalok) porcelains excavated in the same site where our medallion was discovered.

In spite of all these seemingly convincing and definitive proofs of the image's identity, it is, however, with great interest that future research will give more information regarding this image. We look forward with anxiety to the results of a number of archaeological excavations in the Islands, e.g., the Palawan diggings, etc., whose yields may uncover similar artifacts which will shed more light upon our present image.

APPENDIX

THE PRINCIPAL FORMS OF AVALOKITESVARA *

ONE HEAD	I. Human Form	I. Avalokitesvara.	Mudra: namahkara (devotional)
			Symbol: rosary & pink lotus
		II. Padmapani	Mudra: vara (charity)
			Symbols: vase & lotus
			Distinctive mark: Amitabha in Crown

* *Vide* Note No. 10, *supra*.

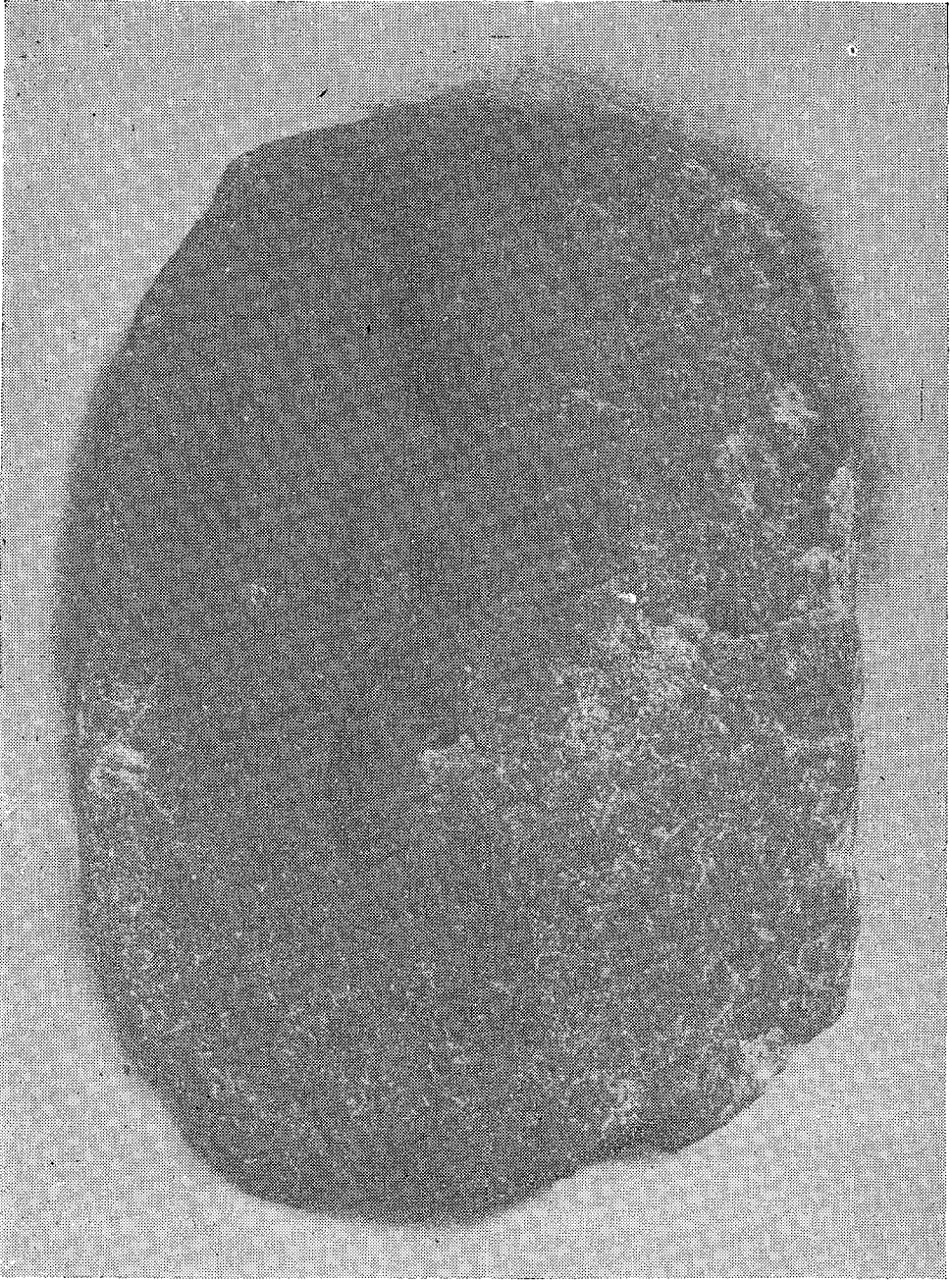


PLATE I
OBVERSE FACE OF THE MEDALLION WITH THE AVALOKITESVARA-PADMAPANI
IN BAS RELIEF. THE BODDHISATTVA IS IN THE TRIBHANGA
(THREE BENDS) POSTURE.

Courtesy of the National Museum, Manila

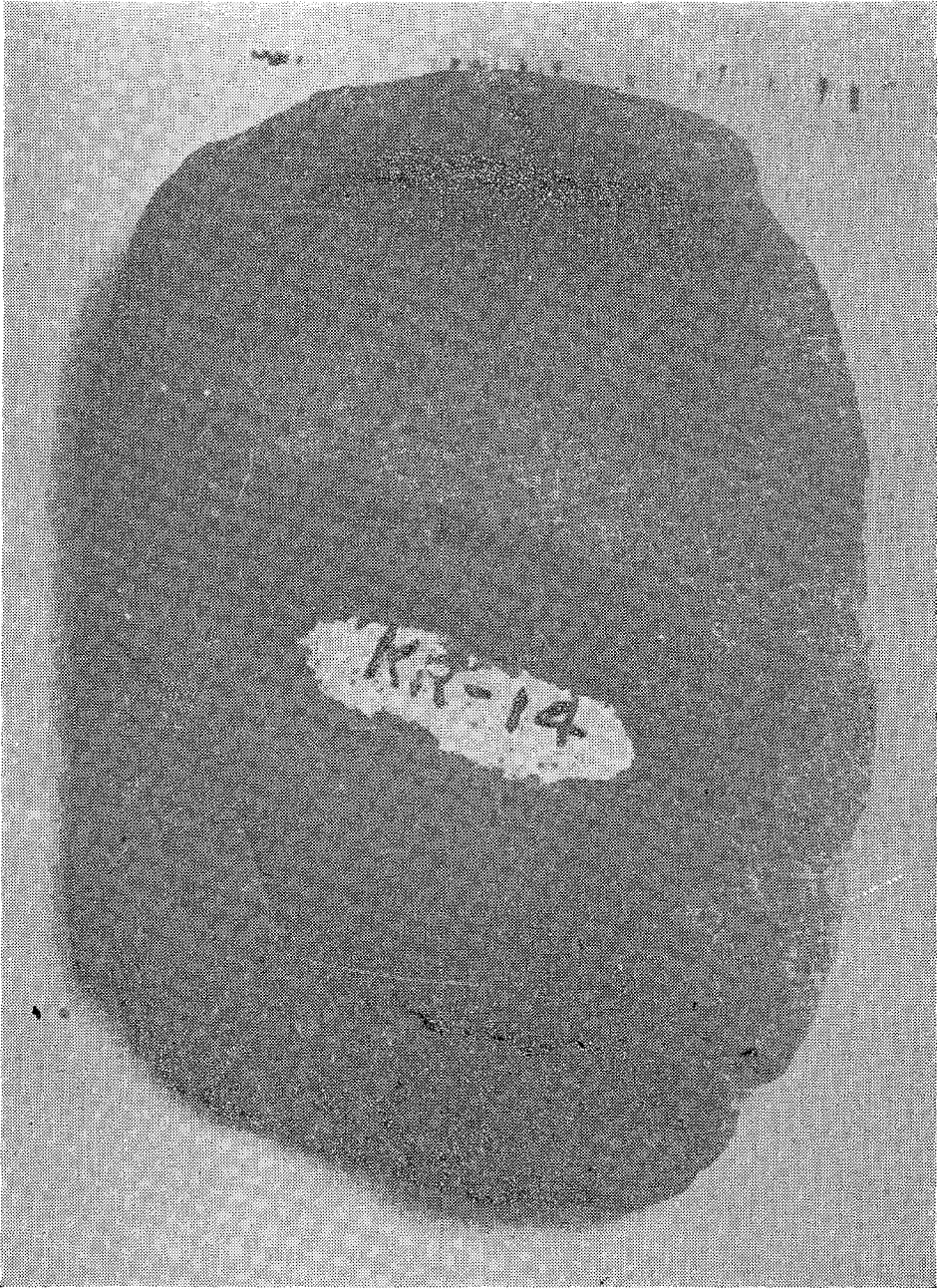


PLATE II
REVERSE FACE OF THE MEDALLION WITH FINGERMARKS. KR-14 REFERS
TO THE SITE, KARITUNAN, ARTIFACT No. 14.

Courtesy of the National Museum, Manila

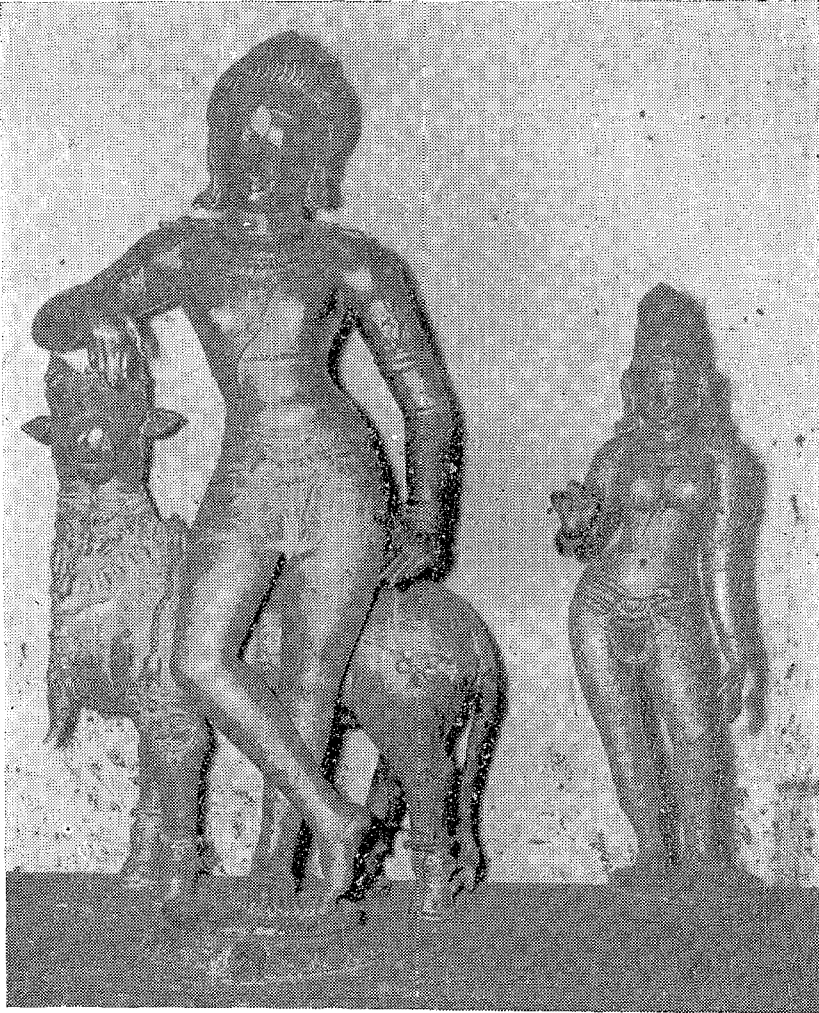


PLATE III

SIVA IN SLIGHT TRIBHANGA, AND PARVATI IN REAL TRIBHANGA.
(FROM KILVELUR, NEGAPATAM TALUQ, MADRAS, INDIA.)
SIVA HERE IS REPRESENTED AS VRISHABHANTIKAMURTI.

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Pondicherry, India*

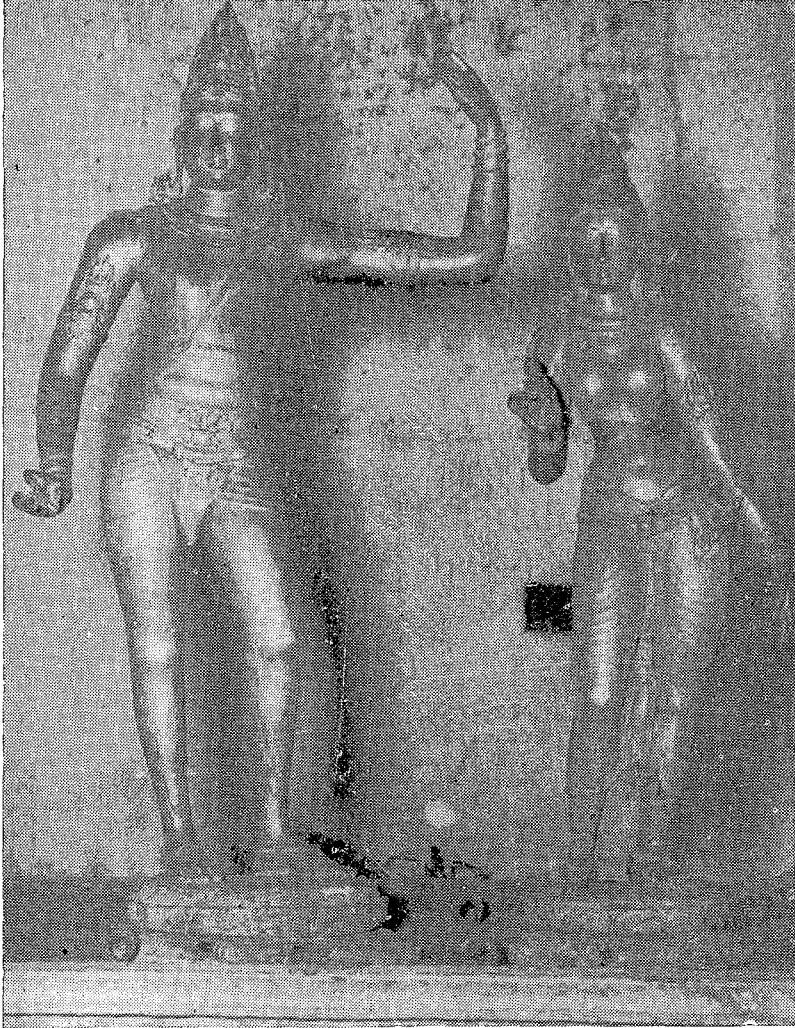


PLATE IV

RAMA AND SITA IN TRIBHANGA. (FROM TIRUCHERAI, KUMBAKONAM TALUQ, MADRAS, INDIA.)

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Pondicherry, India*