

Bulletin

OF THE DETROIT INSTITUTE OF ARTS
OF THE CITY OF DETROIT

VOLUME XXI

JANUARY, 1942

NUMBER 4



COAT-OF-ARMS OF THE MINERBETTI
BY DONATELLO, ITALIAN (FLORENCE), 1386-1466
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Edsel B. Ford, 1941

THE COAT-OF-ARMS OF THE MINERBETTI BY DONATELLO

THANKS to the generosity of Mr. and Mrs. Edsel B. Ford, the museum has come into possession of a great work by Donatello.¹ It is one little known in the literature of Donatello, for it came to America soon after it was rediscovered in Italy in 1925, and has never been published or exhibited in this country. It was described, however, in the Burlington Magazine (July, 1926) by Dr. Bode, who spoke of it in the highest terms, saying that it is "among the finest creations that the Italian Renaissance produced in the realm of plastic art and the undertaking was peculiarly suited to Donatello's talents."

Indeed, even to those who are only superficially acquainted with Donatello's style it communicates his essential characteristics with an authority not to be mistaken. We are reminded in studying the different parts of such famous works as the *Marzocco*, the *Coat-of-Arms of the Martelli* and the putti of the *Cantoria* of the cathedral in Florence. It will take its place, as it becomes better known to students, as an important work of the great master towards the end of his Florentine years before he departed to Padua (1443).

The famous *Coat-of-Arms of the Martelli*, the only one hitherto known by Donatello, was called by Schubring the most beautiful coat-of-arms of Italy, but it may be disputed whether these Minerbetti arms should not take this place. The lion rampant on the shield is certainly not inferior to the griffin of the Martelli, and the cupid bearing the shield so easily by long ribbons, erect and joyous with full-throated laughter, has more appeal than the old man carrying the Martelli shield, who appears so heavily weighted down by it. The lion is not one of the strange, abstract creations of mediaeval armorial bearings, constructed from hearsay by artists who had never seen a lion, but like the *Marzocco* it is studied from nature. (Donatello could study the lions which were kept in the dungeons of the City Hall in Florence, and whose demeanor was carefully observed in times of danger.) Yet it is stylized with a force and intensity which only Donatello was capable of expressing. The ferocious attitude of the lion is contrasted to the light step of the cheerful putto at the top, as the vertical movement of the latter is in contrast to the horizontal one of the lion's outstretched paws.

Donatello shows himself in our sculpture a great master of relief composition in the gradual development of the relief. The flat forms of the lower part of the shield increase slowly in volume towards the upper part until the head of the lion is raised almost to full relief. Above the shield the relief retreats again, but swelling outward from the clouds at the boy's feet in the limbs and body, it ends in the full plastic volume of the head. At the same time the artist keeps his planes always in relation to the flat background of the wall. Thus the legs and

arms of the cupid appear somewhat flattened and the still lower relief of the fluttering ribbons connects his figure and the wall behind.

The Minerbetti bearings differ from the Martelli in that its animal bears a smaller shield upon his breast, which was originally adorned with three swords with converging points. These swords, which were of bronze, have disappeared but the Gothic metal screws that secured them to the shield are still left. By a curious coincidence the Institute owns another coat-of-arms of the Minerbetti which is exhibited in an adjoining gallery to the Donatello, and from which we can reconstruct the three swords missing in Donatello's shield. This later work is from the hands of Francesco di Simone, the pupil of Verrochio, and comes from the tomb of Pietro Minerbetti (1482), formerly in the St. Pancrazio at Florence, where it is described by Vasari. While Francesco di Simone's coat-of-arms is sculptured in marble, Donatello's is executed in the soft, grayish sandstone found near Florence, called *pietra serena*, which Donatello used frequently for his reliefs, especially in his earlier period. The *Marzocco*, the *Annunciation* in Santa Croce, and the coat-of-arms of the *Martelli* are executed in this material.

The Minerbetti, one of the oldest Florentine families, were members of the city government as early as 1300-1310, and in the fifteenth century were related to the Martelli. It is probably for this reason—and this is borne out by stylistic evidence—that Donatello received an order to execute the Minerbetti armorial bearings at the same time as those of the Martelli, which were ordered about 1435-1440 by Roberto Martelli. For Martelli, who was one of Donatello's earliest patrons, a friend of Cosimo Medici and one of the *priori* in 1439, Donatello sculptured the marble David, now in the Widener collection, which can be seen standing in the courtyard of the Martelli palace in the background of the portrait of Ugolino Martelli by Bronzino. Next to this marble our new acquisition may be called the most important work of Donatello in this country. It fills a gap in our series of Florentine Renaissance sculpture in a manner for which we could hardly have dared to hope, as there is little chance that another outstanding work by Donatello will ever again leave Italy.

W. R. VALENTINER

¹Accession Number 41.127. Height: 85 inches; Width: 29¼ inches. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Edsel B. Ford.

References: Wilhelm von Bode, "Newly Discovered Works by Donatello," *Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 49 (1926) pp. 4-9; W. R. Valentiner, "Italian Renaissance Sculpture of the Widener Collection," *The Art News, Twenty-fifth Anniversary Number*, Vol. 26, No. 28 (1928); Hans Kauffman, *Donatello*, Berlin, G. Grote, 1925.

EAST INDIAN BRONZES

THE PREFERENCE for primitive and primitivistic art in the twentieth century makes it difficult for us to approach the civilized art of the highly developed Indian social order. African Negro sculpture and allied forms have received headlines while Medieval Indian sculptures have been hidden in footnotes. Even the distinguished English critic, Roger Fry, spoke condescendingly of Indian sculpture while bestowing praise on more primitive "abstract" forms. Recog-

dition for Indian sculpture came from men of the older generation; the praise of a great sculptor such as Rodin was overlooked or ignored by the younger artists and critics.



PADMAPĀNI
INDIAN. BENGAL, ELEVENTH CENTURY
Gift of H. Kevorkian, 1925

There has been much written about both of these sculptural styles, but Indian art in general has been ill-served by the reiteration of opinions picturing the assumed perfection of Indian (and Oriental) society as contrasted with the assumed imperfection of our own society. Like most controversies stated in terms of black and white, the relative merits of either side can be estimated in degrees of gray. Fortunately for both sides, and for the interested observer, it is no more necessary to be a contemporary of Rājarāja I to understand the meaning of a Chōla sculpture than it is necessary to be a compatriot of Dante to understand a painting by Giotto. A sympathetic and disciplined approach, both intellectual and emotional, will give us understanding of the products of previous ages, while at the same time establishing these products with relation to our own times. The need for absorbing the meaning of an object in terms of the past should not preclude our appreciation of the object with the eyes of the present.

Bronzes (actually copper or brass) make up a large part of the sculptural production of Medieval India. In type they range from the crude productions of provincial artisans to the accomplished works of urban craftsmen; from the simple forms of the single figure to the complex treatment of symbolic groups. All the bronzes are products of theological systems, most often Hindu or Buddhist, and are logically intended as aids to worship. They are not "idols" in any sense of the word. Because of their theological derivation we can expect

much stress to be laid on the canons of symbolism and posture which were especially developed in Indian culture. One cannot explain images with many arms on aesthetic grounds, but because religion had previously determined the number of attributes to be held by the deity. Subject matter and meaning thus become of primary significance in determining the final nature of the sculptural form. It would be folly to consider these objects from a narrowly aesthetic viewpoint.

Buddhist bronzes are represented in our collection by one example, a brass figure of Padmapāṇi with two attendants.¹ Padmapāṇi is one form of Avalo-



UMA
SOUTH INDIAN, FOURTEENTH CENTURY
Gift of the Sarah Bacon Hill Fund, 1941



BĀLA KRŚNA
SOUTH INDIAN, SEVENTEENTH CENTURY
Purchased by City Appropriation, 1927

kiteśvara, the fourth Dhyāni-Bodhisattva, a god of compassion and mercy who renounces his place in heaven until the last living being shall be saved. Padmapāni represents the Indian and the Buddhist ideal at its most human level. He sits on a lotus throne with his right hand in the gesture of charity (*varada hasta*), while the left holds a long-stemmed lotus (*padmā*). His two attendants are in worshipping or adoring positions. The handling is loose and free, while the adoption of a joined, twisted, and applied technique is well suited for modelling in wax and casting in metal. Forms are modelled in an indicative way and then outlined by thin strips, thus approximating a linear style. The profuse nature of the symbolic lotus ornament gives this bronze an air of elaboration that coincides with the period of its making: eleventh century Bengal, the last stronghold of Mahāyāna Buddhist learning in India, and a goal for pilgrim and scholar alike.²

Though Buddhism flourished for a time in the Deccan and Ceylon, Southern India was predominantly Hindu in its religion. From about the sixth century to modern times the Hindu sects, for the most part those of Viṣṇu and Śiva, produced architecture, painting and sculpture that rank high in Indian art. The museum has recently acquired an unusually large South Indian copper figure of Umā (Pārvatī)³ the consort of Śiva. Probably our figure was part of a Śaivaite temple set of great size and importance for its time. The pedestal rings indicate that the figure was designed for processional purposes as well.

Pārvatī (also called Umā, Gaurī when beneficial; Kālī, Durgā when terrible or destructive, etc.), is Śiva's darling, (Śivakāmī), a gracious earth mother moulded by the typical Indian feminine ideal; an ideal that emphasizes the female determinants and which can be traced from the Buddhist monuments at Bārhut of the second century B.C. "With two eyes and two hands, *Shyama* (full breasted), wearing the coronet known as the *Karanda* or *Kirita*, or having her hair tied up in a knot, with all limbs fully developed, wearing ornaments on the feet, bearing the lotus in her right hand, her left hand hanging down, standing or sitting on the centre of the lotus—Gaurī"⁴ Popularly she is Śiva's

consort; philosophically she is the Energy (Śakti) through which Śiva manifests his Godhead. When considered apart from Śiva, Umā is a beneficial manifestation of Devī, a supreme deity in her own right.

Our Umā fulfills the canon with precision and aristocratic grace. The lithe character of the sacred thread (*yajñopavīta*) about her torso is an indication of the taut quality of the whole figure, a characteristic shared with the greatest bronzes produced by western artists such as Verrochio and Pollaiuolo. Despite the volumetric character of the tapering arms, legs and torso, linear detail and outline are of particular importance in this effect. The high quality of the sculpture as a whole is carried through to the smallest detail. The dragon earrings (*makara-kundala*), crisp in treatment and florid in form, are typical of the care and love lavished on detail.

Until systematic investigation clarifies the dating of Indian bronzes, this image must be grouped with those dating from about the fourteenth century.⁵

Later Indian bronzes, usually coarser in outline and more mechanical in detail, seem at their best in small images of a less abstract character. A tiny copper image of Kṛṣṇa as butter thief⁶ represents the youthful incarnation of Viṣṇu as he dances away with the cowherds' butter, one of his many childish pranks joyfully related by Hindu narrators. The small size of the figure makes it necessary to eliminate detail, adding to the simple exuberance of the image. Humanly we see the accustomed antics of the child; theologically we think of the manifestation of Godhead in great and small.

SHERMAN E. LEE

¹Accession Number 25.34. Height: 3¾ inches; Width: 3½ inches. Gift of H. Kevorkian.

²See Alice Getty, *The Gods of Northern Buddhism*, Oxford University Press, 1928, pp. 55-62.

³Accession Number 41.81. Height: 40⅞ inches, with pedestal. Gift of the Sarah Bacon Hill Fund. Exhibited at the Toledo Museum of Art, 1940: Exhibition of East Indian Sculpture. No. 21 in the Catalogue. The only female image of comparable size outside of the British Museum, is in the Freer Art Gallery, Washington, D. C. Śiva images of the same period can be found at Kansas City and Cleveland.

⁴Quoted from the *Kāśyapīya* in Gangoly, *South Indian Bronzes*, Calcutta, 1915, pl. XXXIII.

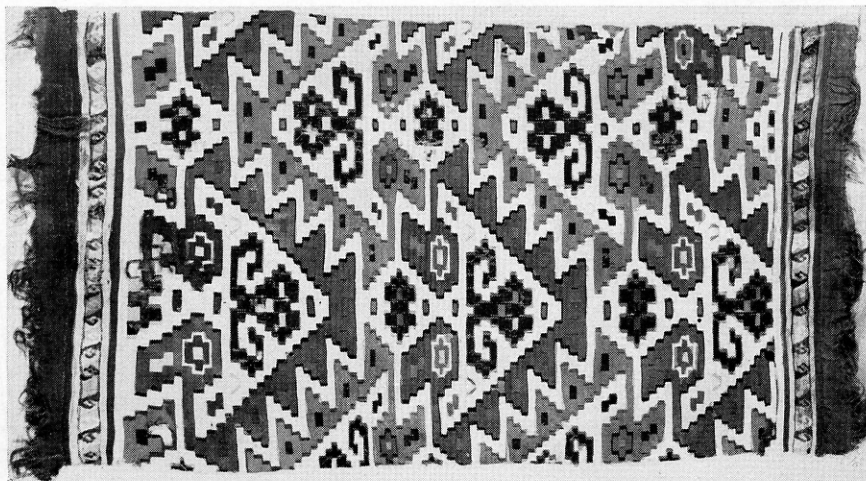
⁵For further information see Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Catalogue of the Indian Collections in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*. Part II, Sculpture.

⁶Accession Number 27.279. Height: 1⅜ inches. Purchased by City Appropriation.

A PERUVIAN TAPESTRY

NEAR THE Spanish city of Trujillo lie the ruins of Chan-Chan, for many hundreds of years the capital of the Chimu dynasty. Very little remains of the palaces that once stood on pyramid terraces amid elaborate gardens. Stucco-like reliefs, gaily painted, covered the adobe walls; curtains, patterned with similar or related designs, covered the doorways.

One of these walls showed a pattern of stylized birds and cat masks.¹ It is clearly a textile design adapted true to scale, for on the walls the units look rather small, while on the woven fabric they appear fairly large. We feel very happy in announcing, as a gift of Mr. and Mrs. Ernest Kanzler, the acquisition of a



TAPESTRY PANEL
 PERUVIAN, LATE CHIMU, 900-1400 A.D.
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Ernest Kanzler, 1941

tapestry panel that possibly may have been part of the decoration of this very room.²

The pattern is woven in medium fine wool, in black, red, yellow and brown on white cotton ground. Each unit of two birds shares one tail; the heads on long thin necks are astonishingly true to nature, though highly stylized. The narrow border of interlocked frets shows a pleasingly irregular color sequence. Slits are used throughout to give a clear separation of color values. In some instances, especially in the cat masks, the slits are over long, jeopardizing the solidity of the fabric. Is this an extra refinement, or a lack of experience on the part of the weaver?

To the border are sewn inch wide strips of monochrome red tapestry, woven separately like a ribbon, the weft ends forming a fringe. At the ends these strips are simply cut off, while the selvages of the panel show traces of having been sewn to similar panels. Thus, while complete in itself, the endless pattern, worked into a large portiere, must have been a perfect match to the painted stucco wall.

ADELE COULIN WEIBEL

¹Philip Ainsworth Means, *Ancient Civilization of the Andes*, New York, 1931, fig. 125.

²Accession Number 41.116. Length: 31½ inches; Width: 18¼ inches. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Ernest Kanzler.

HOURS OF ADMISSION:

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