

# GALERIE GOLCONDA

ARCHÉOLOGIE MUSÉALE  
FOSSILES – BIJOUX RARES ET ANCIENS  
CABINET DE CURIOSITÉS DES GRANDES CIVILISATIONS

## CERTIFICATE

### **SALABHANJIKA TREE DIVINITY INDIA, MADYA PRADESH (10/11th Century)**

*Shalabhanjika* from the Indian sala (tree), *Banjha* (prayers) and *nayika* (mistresses) and by extension “Woman who prays under a branch of a tree”.

**MATERIAL AND TECHNIQUE :** Sculpture in non-porous pink sandstone of medium grain and irregular colour showing detrital ferruginous outcrops of a violet hue on the breasts, the face and the shoulders. The hardness of the stone, on which we can still see traces of the carving knife, explains its good state of preservation. The technique used by the sculptor is halfway between the *ronde-bosse* and the *bas relief*, most likely to limit risks of breakage while work was in progress. This process is typical of the post-Gupta period when they used to embed the statues in niches especially created on the façades of Hindu temples. The back of the statue is smooth, ornamented only by the tree trunk, driving symbol of the fertile sap. Standing in a swaying hip position, called *tribhanga*, typical of Indian sculpture, the goddess displays her fluid and undulating forms in a delicate and precise model crowned by an arched vegetal dais above her head. An extreme meticulousness is shown in the codified treatment of her accessories: at her waist, a belt of an *ottiyanam* type devoted to the sun god is composed, according to the rules, of three rows of trimmings and a flat central buckle with flowers and leaves. The breasts are generous, the shrunken waist in the *Damaruka* (or *Udukkai*) shape, from the name of a drum, symbolically representing the creative capacity of the divine being. The physical features of the mango-shaped face, the fish-shaped eyes and the short and protruding chin with a dimple are accentuated according to the Indian tradition of the region of Madhya Pradesh. A *Kandikai* type necklace is composed of 4 rows of pearls held in their centre by a flat cabochon, recalling that of the belt, and completed by a single row of pearls. The *kuntala*-type hairdo, traditionally attributed to one of Krishna's two wives (*Rukmini* and *Satyabhama*), is of an elegant simplicity. In this particular case, her leaning to the right suggests Krishna was originally on that side of the statue.

Excellent state of preservation. Clear signs of hydric erosion on the right side of the statue, particularly on the breast and on the ear, where some ornaments are missing. Obvious traces of the chisel on the perimeters and the back of the statue. This rare piece has beautiful proportions and is of museum quality.

**ORIGIN:** The tree divinities – *Vrksa devata* or *Salabhanjika* – were a favourite motif of sculptors of ancient and medieval India who celebrated in stone the opulent beauty of feminine shapes, symbolizing fertility through the *Dohada* ritual or the fertilization of plants through contact with women. The tree that we see here is a *Sala tree* of lasting oblong leaves and fragrant, orangey-yellow leaves (also called *ashoka*). It corresponds to the tree grasped by queen Maya Devi while giving birth to Prince Siddhartha, later called Gautama Buddha. Trees have always been the attributes of gods and goddesses, but it should be noted that they belong to the Vedic ritual and not to the Buddhist religion. The statuary of ancient India was originally a spiritual creation, creating the spirit in the shape, the soul in the body. The sculptor also had to follow the iconometric rules of proportion, having as a unit of

measurement the tala, based on the height of the hand or the forehead of the figure. To enhance the Indian canons of feminine beauty, the artist drew from a metaphoric repertoire inspired by direct observation of nature: long but succulent bodies like creepers full of sap, thin waist and deep navel, wide hips like the wheels of a chariot, firm and rounded breasts like goblets full of nectar, tapered arms like bamboo stalks, thighs firm like the trunk of an elephant or the bole of a banana plant.

**DIMENSIONS :** Height 62cm/ 24,409'' without the base and 81cm/ 31,889'' with the base.

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**MUSEOGRAPHY:** Tree divinities from this period are rarely seen in museums. However, we can refer to:

- Musée Guimet Paris, France ref MA 3176
- National Gallery of Victoria Australia, Felton Bequest, 1963 ref 540-D5
- National Museum, New Delhi, India, ref. Huntington, 1969 scan number 0000300.

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