



Seated figure of the Jain Tirthankara Rishabhanatha

On display

Title/Description: Seated figure of the Jain Tirthankara Rishabhanatha

Born: 0700 c.

Object Type: Figure

Materials: Bronze

Measurements: h. 185 x w. 98 x d. 42 mm

Accession Number: 678

Historic Period: 8th century

Production Place: Asia, India

Credit Line: Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1978

Jains (the followers of Mahavir) strictly obeyed four basic rules: *ahimsa*, or strict non-violence; truthful speech; no stealing; no covetousness. They were completely precluded from any work that might take life, including agriculture because even tilling the ground containing life forms was forbidden. They therefore tended to be businessmen and there were many rich Jain merchants in western India trading from the western seaports. They sponsored some of India's most important paintings and sculptures. After a year of wandering and preaching, Mahavir threw away his loin cloth and went naked, which is why Jain statues are always shown naked. Fasting was an important part of Mahavir's life and he in fact died during a fast, aged only 40 years.

Like Buddhist statues, Jain figures may be shown standing or in a sitting meditative pose. The body is immobile, indicating supreme repose and the head straight with contemplative eyes. Jain statues can be identified by a diamond-shaped mark on the chest and always represent one of the 24 Jain *Tirthankaras* or saviours.

This example is an early Jain statue of the first *Tirthankara*, *Rishabha*, indicated by the long hair. He is represented as a naked aesthete in typical yoga pose. His legs are crossed, the soles of the feet uppermost and his hands are folded in the *dhayana mudra* of meditation. Behind his head is the cosmic circle with occasional flames.

Description taken from the 'Art From The Indian Sub-Continent In The Sainsbury Centre' catalogue by Margaret A. Willey (Sainsbury Centre, UEA, 1995).
