



Figure of a dog

On display

Title/Description: Figure of a dog

Born: 0150 c. BC - 0300 c. AD

Object Type: Animal, Figure

Materials: Bronze

Measurements: h. 225 x l. 210 mm

Accession Number: 1029

Historic Period: 2nd century BC, 3rd century

Production Place: Celebes, Pacific, South Sulawesi

This figurine of a dog with a braided collar and decorated 'harness' is reported to have been found near the coast of South Sulawesi, thirty miles south of Ujung Pandang (Makassar). The left hind leg is missing, revealing that the figurine was hollow cast. A sample of carbon from the core tested in 1992 at Oxford gave a standard date of 1640 ± 70 bp (calibrated to between 155 BC and AD 330 at 95% probability). Another figurine of a dog, in the Christensen Fund collection in Honolulu, is said to have been found by fishermen on the same coast. This second specimen wears a very similar harness, though lacking the collar, but the treatment of the head is more naturalistic, and it carries a stiffly curled tail. The Honolulu dog is also younger, having a standard radio-carbon date of 1640 ± 70 bp (calibrated to AD 230-580 at 95% probability), and is a ternary alloy high in both lead and tin. The present dog is likely to have a similar composition.

These appear to be the only two pre-Indianising figurines of dogs reported from Indonesia, although dogs appear as background figures in a number of Hindu images, and one or more dogs attacking a buffalo are carved below a Dong Son-style drum on the stone sculpture from Air Puar in Sumatra (Bernet Kempers, 1988: pl. 1.05 a-b).

In Southeast Asia, domesticated dogs are found in neolithic cultures of the 3rd millennium bc and may have been introduced into Indonesia by Austronesian settlers. Dogs figure prominently in the mythologies of the peoples of the outer islands, and it is only with the coming of Islam, which classifies dogs and pigs as unclean, that they become less visible in the arts and cultures of the peoples of Central Indonesia.

Entry taken from Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection 3 volume catalogue, edited by Steven Hooper (Yale University Press, 1997).
