



A NAGA WITH A FLASK
MATHURÁ SCHOOL—1ST-2ND CENTURY A.D.

9. *Indian Sculpture:*
A Naga with a Flask

AMONG the many Indian pieces long in storage but recently put on display in the Museum is a fragment of considerable artistic merit showing in relief a Naga with Flask. The piece belongs to the Mathurā School and is carved from the mottled red sandstone common around Mathurā (Muttra). Similar images exist in the Muttra museum, and analogous types have been found elsewhere in India.

The Sanskrit word *naga* means "serpent," and a Naga is a being now serpent, now anthropomorphic, now both, with superhuman qualities, yet lower than a god. The religion of India from very early times has contained worship of Nagas, and in the legendary history of the Buddha and of certain other great teachers these creatures figure prominently. Their worship persists to the present day in many forms and in many parts of India, as for example in Kashmir, where every spring has a Naga for its presiding genius, while the modern folklore from all over the country is filled with stories of them as custodians of wealth and doers of wonders.

Our fragment, which is just ten inches high, shows a human body, broad-shouldered and narrow-waisted, with a ring of seven cobra heads behind the human head. These heads give the effect, although probably not the significance, of a halo. The body of the seven-headed serpent does not appear, although in some of the parallel examples in the Muttra museum it is represented by great coils behind the human figure. The body

of our image is clothed with a lower garment and an upper, the latter being indicated only by a couple of wavy lines running transversely across the breast and showing that the right shoulder is bare. A necklace, bracelets, earrings, and an elaborate headdress serve as ornaments. The right hand is raised in a characteristic gesture called "fearlessness" (*abhaya*) to show that those approaching the figure are assured of security. In the left hand is a flask. The image belongs to the Kushan period, and is probably from the first or early part of the second century.

The iconographic type illustrated by this image is of considerable interest in the history of Indian sculpture. From it and the somewhat similar contemporaneous (or earlier) Yaksha types seem to evolve, during the first two centuries of the Christian era, the Buddha, the Jina, and certain other iconographic forms of the Mathurā school, which in their turn were the forerunners of a large number of later types. The gesture of the right hand is characteristic of many of the earliest representations of the Buddha in human form (the first representations of the Buddha were aniconically, by symbols). The ornamented figure is that of the Bodhisattvas, or potential Buddhas. The flask recalls that filled with *amṛta* (nectar) carried by Maitreya. The figure as a whole later becomes Nagarjuna and the Hindu deity Baladeva.

10. *A Silver Vase from Peru*

THE tall silver vase illustrated on Plate X is probably the largest known specimen of a very characteristic type. It is not