

# ASIAN ART COLLECTION

India

***Shiva with His Consort Uma***

Tenth century

Cream sandstone

32<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 20<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> × 5 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (83.2 × 52.1 × 14.9 cm)

Museum collection, University Gallery purchase

S-72-11

Much akin to *The Goddess Durga Slaying the Buffalo Demon*, this stone stele was originally set within a side niche of a medieval Hindu temple that was most probably located in north-central India. The obvious wear on the sculpture reinforces the likelihood that it was originally displayed on the exterior façade of a temple and that it spent many centuries exposed to the elements in an overhanging niche. The weathered cream sandstone relief sculpture powerfully portrays the Hindu deity Shiva, “the great lord,” and his consort Uma, also known as Devi or Parvati.

Posed in seated positions of “royal ease,” the majestic heavenly pair exude the humanness of a loving embrace: Uma gracefully sits upon Shiva’s left thigh while one of his many arms holds her steady and close, cupping her left breast from underneath. Together, Shiva and Uma symbolize the ultimate creative power of the universe and the fullness of the supreme beings. The panoply of other characters surrounding the two deities generates a rich iconographic program, reinforcing the devotional nature of the image. Since the stele program concentrates on Shiva and Uma, they were carved in the center and several times larger than their surrounding cast of supportive characters. Shiva steadies his trident in his upper right hand while his upper left hand grasps a threeheaded cobra adjacent to Uma’s head and his lower left hand caresses Uma. His lower right hand originally held either a fruit or a lotus bud, but damage over the centuries has made it impossible to distinguish now. Uma’s right arm is placed atop Shiva’s right shoulder to pull him closer. Her left hand would have originally held a mirror, but this too is now partially obscured by damage.



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Shiva and Uma are seated upon their animal vehicles, Shiva's bull and Uma's lion, which are atop the center of the base. The majestic pair's son Ganesh, known as the Remover of Obstacles, is seated below Shiva's right knee. On the opposite side under Uma's upturned right leg is Karttikeya, the god of war. At the top center, a pair of airborne heavenly beings crown the stele apex with a five-pillar object, arguably five linga, representing Shiva's manifestations as well as omnipresence and limitless powers. To the left of the central apex is Brahma, the Universe Creator; to the right is Vishnu, god of preservation.

