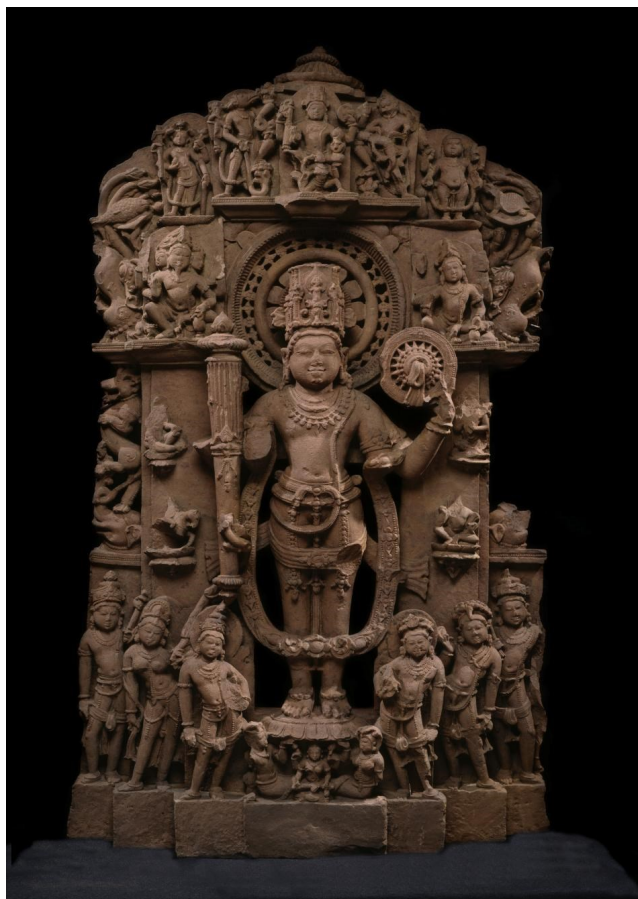


## Hirsch Library Research Guide



### Vishnu and his Avatars 71.1

Artist/Culture: Unknown Indian

Date: c. 10th Century

Place: Central Region, India

Medium: Red Sandstone

Dimensions: 138.4 x 80 x 21.3 cm

This large, complex relief sculpture once adorned the exterior of a Hindu temple. Before entering, visitors prepared for meditation by studying elaborate imagery. The central figure is Vishnu, the preserver of the world. You can identify him by his attributes: on the right he holds a chakra or discus, signifying mind or spirit. On the left, the tall mace means combating ignorance. Vishnu, Brahma, and Shiva are the three most important Hindu gods. Look at the figure above the mace—that's the god Brahma. Shiva, the destroyer, is on the opposite side of Vishnu, above the discus. The figures flanking Vishnu's feet personify his attributes. The figure on the very left is a human representation of the discus in Vishnu's left hand. At the top of the carving is a fish and a tortoise. They, and the other figures at the top of this sculpture are Vishnu's avatars, or earthly incarnations.

### Online Resources:

[Hirsch Library Online Catalog](#)

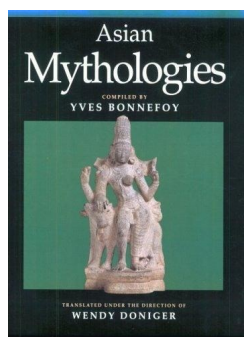
[MET Museum of Art Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History](#)

**Articles:** (full-text access available on-site; off-site access available through your school library or HPL System)

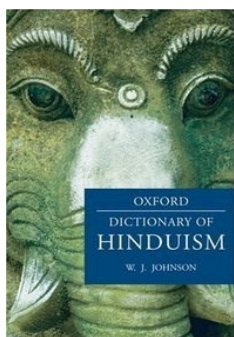
[Losty, J. P. et al. "Indian Subcontinent," \*Grove Art Online\* \(2005\). doi: <https://doi.org/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.article.T040113>](#)

[Ali, Daud. "The Historiography of the Medieval in South Asia," \*Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society\* 22, no. 1 \(2012\): 7-12.](#)

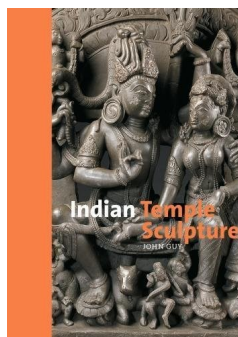
### Print Resources:



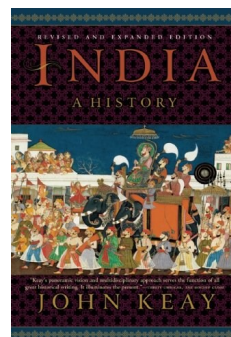
[Asian Mythologies](#)



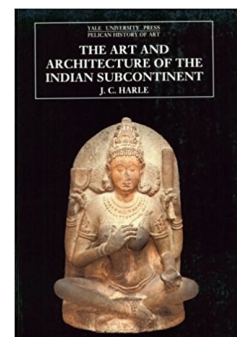
[Oxford Dictionary of Hinduism](#)



[Indian Temple Sculpture](#)



[India: A History](#)



[The Art and Architecture of the Indian Subcontinent](#)

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### Object Specific Information

[Agee, William C. and Celeste Adams. \*The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston: A Guide to the Collection.\* \(Houston: The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 1981\): 6.](#)

N 576 .H7 A6 Ready Ref.

[Shrader, J. L. "Recent Acquisitions: A Trimurti and the Avatars and Icon of Vishnu." \*The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston\* 2, no. 6 \(1971\): 70-74.](#)

N 576 .H7 A3 n.s. v.2 Ready Ref.

[Marzio, Peter C. \*The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston: A Permanent Legacy.\* \(Houston: The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 1989\): 68.](#)

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### General Surveys of Indian Art

[Mitter, Partha. \*Indian Art.\* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. See esp. Part I. "Buddhist and Hindu Art and Architecture \(c. 300 BCE—1700 CE\)"](#)

N 7301 .M48 2001 Ref.

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N 5300 .G25 2005

### Hinduism

[Long, Jeffery D. \*Historical Dictionary of Hinduism.\* Lanham: The Scarecrow Press Inc., 2011.](#)

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[Williams, George M. \*Handbook of Hindu Mythology.\* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.](#)

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### Vishnu

[Begley, W. E. \*Visnu's Flaming Wheel: The Iconography of the Sudarsana-Cakra.\* New York: New York University Press, 1973.](#)

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[Johnson, Gordon. \*Cultural Atlas of India.\* Oxfordshire: Andromeda Oxford Limited, 1996.](#)

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[Craven, Roy C. \*Indian Art: A Concise History.\* London: Thames and Hudson, 1997](#)

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### Indian Sculpture/Art

[Newman, Richard. \*The Stone Sculpture of India: A Study of Materials Used by Indian Sculptors from ca. 2nd century B. C. to the 16th century.\* Cambridge: Center for Conservation and Technical Studies at Harvard University Art Museums, 1984.](#)

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### Symbolism

[Bunce, Fredrick W. \*A Dictionary of Buddhist and Hindu Iconography: Illustrated.\* New Delhi: D. K. Print World \(P\) Ltd., 1997.](#)

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[Hall, James. \*Illustrated Dictionary of Symbols in Eastern and Western Art.\* New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1994, 24, 49, 64, 73.](#)

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[Jansen, Eva Rudy. \*The Book of Hindu Imagery: Gods, Manifestations, and their Meaning.\* Diver: Binkey Kok Publications, 1993.](#)

BL 1216 .J26 1993 Ref

This reference guide is just the tip of the iceberg on helpful resources in the library's holdings. Many of the suggested resources above have their own bibliographies. Each of these may lead you to another resource that would also be helpful in your research here in the museum or in another library. To find additional resources, use keywords such as "Hindu," "India," and "sculpture" in the online catalog and in periodical indexes. Once you find a few relevant titles, pay attention to the subject headings to identify similar materials. Examples of useful subject headings are:

*Hindu mythology*

*Hindu art*

*India Civilization*

*Sculpture, Indic*

*Art, Indic*

For guidelines about writing it may be helpful to look at Sylvan Barnet's *A Short Guide to Writing about Art*, which includes tips for looking, reading, and writing about art. Ask for it at the reference desk. At every stage of your work, please allow the library staff to help you. Contact us at 713-639-7323 or [Hirsch@mfa.org](mailto:Hirsch@mfa.org)