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Sojourner Hunt April 12, 2022

Four Lives of A Balakrishna Bronze

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a thesis submitted to the Faculty of Emory College of Arts and Sciences
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Abstract

Four Lives of a Balakrishna Bronze
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This thesis tells the life history of the Michael C. Carlos Museum's Dancing Balakrishna bronze statue through a cultural biography. Despite the known life history of the bronze being incomplete, four life phases emerge: life in India, life in a private collection, life on the art market, and life in the Michael C. Carlos Museum.Through a cultural biography, this thesis examines how the institutions, religions, economic environments, cultures, centuries, and buildings surrounding the bronze affected the construction of value and meaning in four phases of the bronze's life; and demonstrates that a biographical approach is still generative in an object whose known history is incomplete.

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Dancing Balakrishna, 11th-13th Century, Bronze, 18 1/4 x 7 3/4 x 6 in. (46.3 x 19.7 x 15.3 cm), Atlanta, The Michael C. Carlos Museum.

Introduction

This thesis grew out of a summer 2021 project to research the provenance of the Asian collection at the Michael C. Carlos Museum with Assistant Registrar and Provenance Researcher, Dr. Annie Shanley. I first learned about provenance during the Spring 2021 semester when I enrolled in the perfect storm of classes. In "Introduction to African Art in Museums" with Dr. Gagliardi I read and discussed provenance and museums; and in "Depicting God in Hinduism" with Dr. Gough, provenance became more tangible as the class worked with objects from the Asian collection from the Michael C. Carlos museum to curate an exhibition, *The Avatars of Vishnu*. The latter was my first exposure to the objects in Carlos Museum's permanent Asian collection. Through these classes and researching the provenance of the Asian collection over the following summer, I became interested in the Michael C. Carlos Museum's (MCCM) Dancing Balakrishna Chola Bronze.

This thesis reconstructs the life history of the MCCM bronze through a biographical approach. In his 1986 essay, anthropologist Igor Kopytoff argues that the biographical approach commonly applied to tracing the lifetime of people, can also be applied to things.[1] Further, he writes about a cultural biography of things, an approach that views an object as "a culturally constructed entity, endowed with culturally specific meanings, and classified and reclassified into culturally constituted categories".[2] The focus of a cultural biography is how cultural surroundings construct and reconstruct meaning and value in an object.

Intertwined with defining meaning in cultural contexts is Arjun Appadurai's idea of "regimes of value" which explains cross cultural commodity exchange saying that when a commodity is exchanged across cultures, this does not mean the value of the commodity remains

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[1] Igor Kopytoff, "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as a Process," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge University Press, 1986), 66.
[2] Kopytoff, "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as a Process," 68.

the same.[3] Instead, in each cultural context, a multitude of factors come together to construct the regime of value; religion, physical location, ownership, cultural customs, social context are all parts of a regime of value.[4] What Appadurai shows is that the regime of value does not have to be the same from one cultural setting to the next for a commodity to be exchanged. Instead, the regime of value is re-constructed with each exchange.

Both Appadurai and Koptyoff agree that commodity is not a fixed label; instead, during the lifetime of an object, it has the potential to move in and out of the "commodity phase".[5] At its most basic, a commodity is something that is exchangeable. But Appadurai breaks the commodity situation into the commodity phase (the moment in the life of an object where is it a commodity), commodity candidacy (the potential for an object to be a commodity in this particular moment), and commodity context (the social situation that puts a commodity in a situation in which it can be exchanged).[6] With these definitions in mind, Appadurai defines a commodity as anything that "at a certain phase in their careers and in a particular context, meets the requirements of commodity candidacy".[7]

This thesis uses the provenance research conducted over the summer of 2021 as a foundation and applies Kopytoff's theory of cultural biographies and Appadurai's ideas on the commodity phase to the MCCM bronze. This work follows in the footsteps of religion scholar Richard H. Davis, who has spent much of his professional career applying a biographical approach to Indian religious objects and texts.[8] Davis has even written cultural biographies for

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[3] Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge University Press, 1986), 15.
[4] Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," 15.
[5] Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," 17.
[6] Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," 14.
[7] Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," 16.
[8] Richard Davis, *The Bhagavad Gita: A Biography*, Princeton University Press, 2014; and Richard Davis, *Lives of Indian Images*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); and Richard Davis "What do Indian Images Really Want? A Biographical Approach," In *Sacred Objects in Secular Spaces: Exhibiting Asian Religions in Museums,* Edited By Bruce M. Sullivan, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015.

Chola bronzes, yet he chooses images that have very well documented histories in Europe, America and India.[9] Davis also focuses on objects whose biographies are representative of dramatic shifts in the lives of Indian objects in general. In contrast, this cultural biography follows an object whose whole origins in India remain speculative and whose provenance has been mislabeled. This level of uncertainty in the life of the MCCM bronze is much more common for Indian images than the well documented images that Davis follows. Additionally, despite the uncertainty, methods such as "imaginative reconstruction" are used to piece together ritual practices, provenance, cultural rituals, and biographies of humans and institutions, to create a cultural biography of the MCCM bronze.[10]

Through the cultural biography method, four life phases of the MCCM bronze emerge. Chapter one is a speculative history of its life in India which relies upon historical knowledge of medieval Hinduism, the Chola era, and the South India bronze tradition. This chapter draws heavily from the work of art historian Vidya Dehejia, whose recent scholarship uses temple inscriptions to learn about temple traditions and processional bronzes in Chola India.[11] Chapters two and three illustrate a case of incorrect provenance, the process of researching this mislabeling, and its implications for the MCCM bronze's trajectory through the art market. Chapter four examines the MCCM bronze in the museum context and similarities and differences between the museum and the temple settings. This chapter asks whether museums are religious spaces – or more broadly speaking ritual spaces – and how religious objects interact with museum settings.

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[9] Davis, Richard, *Lives of Indian Images,* chapters 1 and 7.
[10] Davis, "What do Indian Images Really Want? A Biographical Approach" 25.
[11] Vidya Dehejia, *The Thief Who Stole my Heart: The Material Life of Sacred Bronzes from Chola India, 855-1280,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2021).

During the life of the MCCM bronze, it has been placed on paths and assigned labels by its cultural contexts. The MCCM bronze has remained the same image, yet the people, institutions, religions, economic environments, cultures, centuries, and buildings surrounding the bronze have changed. Through a cultural biography, this thesis examines how those structures affected the construction of value and meaning in four phases of the MCCM bronze's life and demonstrates that a biographical approach is still fruitful in an object with an incomplete history.

Chapter 1: Life as a Processional Image

Unlike Richard H. Davis's cultural biographies of thoroughly documented Indian images, this thesis follows a Chola bronze with no documentation of a life in India. Therefore, chapter one employs what Davis calls "imaginative reconstruction" which uses historical knowledge about the Chola Era, Hindu temples, festival traditions, Balakrishna, and Chola bronze making techniques to piece together a speculative life for the bronze in India. What this method can speculate on very clearly is the production process for the MCCM bronze, its role during religious festivals, the temple rituals it would have participated in, and the value this bronze holds to the patron and the temple it resided in. Where speculation becomes difficult is with dating the MCCM bronze due to its lack of inscription and often inconclusive methods available for dating Chola bronzes.

The Cholas

The Cholas are first mentioned as one of the ruling kingdoms of ancient south India in The Edicts of Ashoka from the third century BCE.[12] The Cholas' first reign lasted around three centuries but was brought to an end by the invasion of the Kalabhras. In the ninth century CE, the Cholas reemerged in the southwestern coast of India as a subordinate dynasty who pledged their allegiance to the Pallavas.[13] Around 850 Cholla allegiance to the Pallavas wavered and the Cholas took Tanjavur, naming the city as their capital.[14] The battle to end Pallava control was won by Aditya I (r. 870-907), the first Chola king to rule without the Pallavas.[15] Under Aditya I, the Cholas consolidated their rule of southern India through military and diplomatic means,

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[12] Kulke, Herman and Dietmar Rothermund, *A History of India; Fifth Edition,* (London and New York: Routledge Press, 2010), 68.
[13] Kulke, *A History of India,* 82.
[14] John Guy, "Parading the Gods: Bronze Devotional Images of Chola South India," in *Chola: Sacred Bronzes of Southern India.* Edited by Vidya Dehejia, (London: Royal Academy of Art, 2006), 13.
[15] Kulke, *A History of India,* 82.

gaining territory from the Pallava, Pandya, and Ganga kingdoms.[16] During the reign of Aditya's son, Parantaka I (r. 907-955), the Cholas expanded their territory north to Kalahasti and absorbed Pallava and Pandya territory bringing an end to the two kingdoms.[17]

Once Chola territory was established, the rulers turned their efforts towards patronage. Rajaraja Chola (r. 985-1014) commissioned the Rajarajeshvara temple, the largest temple in the Indian subcontinent at that time.[18] Subsequent rulers followed suit, building rich, monumental temples as a show of piety, to affirm their right to rule, and to remind the public of the ruler's splendor. The Chola style persisted even after the dynasty's fall to the Pandya Empire at the end of the 13th-century. Subsequent states in South India, especially the Vijayanagaran dynasty (r. 1336-1645) emulated the legendary Chol style and patronage.

The Cholas were a Hindu Dynasty and most Chola rulers were Shaivites, or followers of the Hindu god Shiva. Traditions of Shaivism, cultivated through sacred texts and practices, began to be recognized between 200 BCE to 100 CE.[19] Another sect of Hinduism is Vaishnavism, or devotees of Vishnu, whom the Cholas allowed to co-exist peacefully and erect temples throughout the Empire. The Cholas also tolerated the Buddhist and Jain faiths and allowed the construction of temples dedicated to other Hindu deities. A calculation by Vidya Dehejia, based upon T. V. Mahalingam's publication of inscriptions, concludes that there were 311 temples in the Chola heartland around the Kaveri river delta.[20] Of these 311, 295 were temples to Shiva and 16 were dedicated to Vishnu. This study is not of the entirety of Chola territory; it only includes statistics from the modern day districts of Tiruchurappalli, Thanjavur,

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[16] Kulke, *A History of India,* 82.
[17] Kulke, *A History of India,* 82.
[18] Guy, "Parading the Gods: Bronze Devotional Images of Chola South India", 14.
[19] Gavin Flood, "The Saiva Traditions" in *The Blackwell Companion to Hinduism,* edited by Gavin Flood, (Malden MA: Blackwell Press), 205.
[20] Dehejia, *The Thief Who Stole my Heart,* 38; and 293n 7.

and Nagapattinam but a similar proportion of Shiva to Vishnu temples can be extrapolated for all of Chola territory.[21]

This estimation does not include temples to Krishna within the Chola Empire which existed though they were few in number.[22] The Hindu god Krishna is an avatar of the god Vishnu, though Krishna is also a supreme god in his own right. Krishna is found in two of Hinduism's founding texts the *Mahabharata* and the *Bhagavata-Purana*. Krishna was born the son of Vasudeva and Devaki. Krishna's uncle, King Kamsa, heard a prophecy that a child of Devaki would destroy him. Thus, King Kamsa tried to kill Krishna in order to prevent the prophecy; however Krishna escaped and spent his childhood among cowherders. As a child, Krishna was playful, known to dance and enjoy music which explains the popularity of images of Balakrishna dancing or with a butterball. As a Balakrishna, the MCCM bronze could be at home in a temple dedicated to Vishnu, or in a temple strictly devoted to Krishna. Temples devoted to Vishnu often had images of multiple avatars such as the Vaishnava temple in Uttaramerur which boasted consecrated images including Krishna.[23]

During the four centuries of their reign, the Cholas established strong trade and diplomatic relationships while expanding their borders overseas to rule over most of Sri Lanka and the Maldive Islands. This territory, in conjunction with established trade routes from Aden to China, allowed for the economic vibrance of the Cholas which in turn allowed for the construction of the temples and bronzes we admire today. Under the Cholas, south India came to the forefront of Indian history for the first time.[24] Though the Cholas boast an extraordinary reign, their greatest legacy today in subsequent centuries and to this day are their temples and

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[21]Dehejia, *The Thief Who Stole my Heart,* 38; and 293n7.
[22] P. Padmaja, *Temples of Krishna in South India: History, Art, and Traditions in Tamil Nadu,* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 2002), 90-91.
[23] P. Padmaja, *Temples of Krishna in South India: History, Art, and Traditions in Tamil Nadu,* 87-88.
[24] Kulke, *A History of India; Fifth Edition,*77.

processional bronzes. These artistic and architectural accomplishments have stood the test of time thanks to the Chola innovation of using durable materials. The Cholas began constructing temples out of stone and making processional icons out of metal as opposed to wood.[25] Durable materials and the codification of an internationally adored Chola style make Chola temples and bronzes the everlasting achievement of their empire.

Origins of Processional Bronzes

The production of processional images began with the Pallavas, but it was the Cholas' heavy patronage and the formulation of a Chola aesthetic style that led to their rise in popularity and abundance. By the sixth century, evidence suggests that a new idea emerged where Hindu deities were no longer stationary, only to be worshiped in the inner sanctum of a temple.[26] Instead, "the deity began to be visualized as assuming a public persona" and as a public figure, was required to have a public presence at festivals and make rounds of the temple.[27] The linga, made of heavy stone at the center of the temple, was not a suitable object to process. It is an aniconic representation of a Shiva and also an immovable object. Thus there was a demand to produce smaller, portable, easily recognizable deities for festivals and processions.

The earliest evidence of processional images can be found in the writing of seventh century Shaiva saint, Appar. In a hymn for the celebration of the festival of Adirai Appar writes,

"He goes on his begging rounds

Amid the glitter of a pearl canopy

And gem-encrusted golden fans,

Devoted men and women follow him,

Along with Virati ascetics in bizarre garb,

[25] Dehejia, "Chola Bronzes: How, When, and Why," 11.
[26] Dehejia, "Chola Bronzes: How, When, and Why," 13.
[27] Dehejia, "Chola Bronzes: How, When, and Why," 13.

Garlanded with white skulls"[28]

Appar refers specifically to Shiva as Bhikshatana, Shiva as beggar. He pictures his figure outside the temple in a lavish procession, with devotees following him.[29] The journey of processional icons outside of the temple grounds allowed more people an audience with the deity. One's social status dictated how far into the temple one could venture. In Shaiva temples, only brahmin men who had undergone an initiation were eligible to enter the innermost sanctum while other social groups had to stop at the entrance to the sanctum, or even at the *gopuram*, the entry tower.[30] When the deities left the temple, however, the lowest levels of society were given the chance to witness the gods. Processional icons thus became popular in the empire, and the Chola elite commissioned processional icons as an attempt to please the gods, the public, and gain political and financial fortune.

The production of processional bronzes grew out of a need for a portable dwelling for a deity and a durable material was beneficial.[31] Prior to 855, the Cholas and the Pallavas constructed portable temple images from wood.[32] Wooden images required frequent replacement and disintegrated quickly from the frequent lathering processional images enjoyed. Metal, on the other hand, is a much more durable material that can better sustain frequent rubbings. To examine how these bronze processional images were made we must first think about the raw materials required to make bronzes.

Metal Sourcing in Medieval South India

[28] Guy, "*Parading the Gods: Bronze Devotional Images of Chola South India,"* 19; and 25n19.
[29] Guy, "*Parading the Gods: Bronze Devotional Images of Chola South India,"* 19.
[30] Richard Davis, "Chola Bronzes in Procession" in *The Sensuous and the Sacred: Chola Bronzes from South India.* Ed. Vidya Dehejia. (American Federation of Arts in Association with the University of Washington Press, 2002), 51
[31] Vidya Dehejia, "The Thief Who Stole my Heart: The Material Life of Sacred Bronzes from Chola India, 855-1280, Part 1," A. W. Mellon Lecture in the Fine Arts, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. May 6th, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jjyjEVLIswA.
[32] Dehejia *The Thief Who Stole my Heart,* 23.

Vidya Dehejia, the leading scholar on Chola bronzes, set out for three years of fieldwork intent on asking never-before studied questions about Chola bronzes. During this journey, Dehejia was shocked to find that, "no one has a clue regarding the source from which copper was obtained to create this multitude of Chola bronzes".[33] In order to determine the source of copper for Chola bronzes, Dehejia collaborated with scholars and professionals across fields and around the globe. Although her search ended short of a decisive conclusion, she illuminates the likely options for the source copper of Chola bronzes.

The 855 shift from wood to bronze processional images meant a sudden abundance of bronze casting within Chola territory and required a source of copper, lead, and tin. Tin is sufficiently prevalent in southeast Asia though only a small amount was required for processional bronzes. A study at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art concluded that Chola bronzes are between 90-95 percent copper, with the remaining 5-10 percent being an even split between tin and lead.[34] Tin can be found in central India as well as in Southern Thailand, where a trading post, known to be frequented by the Cholas, was established in the ninth century.[35] Both locations are plausible sources of tin for Chola bronzes. Lead is prevalent in India and accessible to the Cholas as it has been mined in Rajasthan for around 2000 years.[36]

The source of copper, on the other hand, poses a much larger question as the metal is known to be absent from the Chola heartlands of Tamil Nadu.[37] The amount of copper needed to cast the abundance of Chola bronzes that were created was not insignificant. Dehejia estimates that each temple had, on average, 12 bronzes, thus 153 tons of copper would have been needed to cast the bronzes. This estimation only accounts for the bronzes within the three most central

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[33] Dehejia, *The Thief Who Stole my Heart,* 24.
[34] Dehejia *The Thief Who Stole my Heart,* 23; and 291n23
[35] Dehejia, *The Thief Who Stole my Heart,* 28.
[36] Lynn Willies, P. T. Craddock, L. J. Gurgar, K. T. M Hedge, "Ancient Lead and Zinc Mining in Rajasthan, India," in *World Archaeology* 16 No. 2 (Oct, 1984): 222-233.
[37] Dehejia, *The Thief Who Stole my Heart,* 23-24.

Chola districts: Trichy, Thanjavur, and Nagapattinam.[38] With copper coming from Chola territory out of the question, the next option is the copper sources of northern India: Rajasthan and Bihar.[39] However, Rajasthan and Bihar were largely disqualified as the copper sources for Chola bronzes due to the deposits yielding ore with low percentages of copper.[40]

In continuing her search for the Chola source of copper, Dehejia turned abroad to the Cholas' strong trade networks. Two maritime trade records mention copper trading in and out of India in two distinct periods. *The Periplus of the Erythrean Sea,* a first-century travel log of an Egyptian-Greek merchant, mentions copper being imported to Barygaza, a port on the Northwest coast of India (medieval and modern Bharuch).[41] But as Lionel Casson points out, this is confusing because while *The Periplu*s documents the importation of copper to Barygaza, it also documents the exportation of Indian copper, likely originating from the aforementioned deposits in Rajasthan, from Barygaza.[42] It is possible that the imported ore contained a higher percentage of copper? This could be one explanation as to why a port would import the same product it is exporting but for now, as Lionel Casson says, "our information about Indian copper is contradictory, and attempts to resolve the problem are mere guesswork".[43]

Maritime trade in copper is also attested in the Cairo Geniza, much closer chronologically to the height of Chola bronze production. The Cairo Geniza is a worn-text repository located within the Ben Ezra Synagogue in Cairo. In the Jewish tradition it is forbidden to dispose of any paper containing the word of God, even interpersonal letters or business correspondence. Instead, these texts are placed in a *geniza* while they await burial. Around 400,000 pages of text from the

[38] Dehejia, *The Thief Who Stole my Heart*, 5; and 289n10.
[39] Dehejia, *The Thief Who Stole my Heart,* 24.
[40] Dehejia, *The Thief Who Stole my Heart,* 24.
[41] Dehejia, *The Thief Who Stole my Heart,* 25. Lionel Casson, *The Periplus Maris Erythraei text with Introduction, Translation, and Commentary,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 28-29.
[42] Casson, *The Periplus,* 29.
[43] Casson, *The Periplus,* 29.

eleventh to nineteenth centuries were dropped in the Cairo Geniza originating from the entirety of the Mediterranean basin, parts of Western Europe, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Indian Ocean forelands.[44]

A twelfth-century Geniza letter by Jewish merchant Joseph Ben Abraham in Aden to Abraham Ben Yiju, owner of a factory in Mangalore, mentioned the dispatch of scraps of metal from Aden with instructions to turn the scraps into trays, jugs, and candle sticks in Mangalore.[45] Perhaps it was cheaper for a resident of Aden to acquire scrap metal, ship it for production in India, then ship it back to Aden than it was to use copper mined in India. Or maybe Ben Abraham was also seeking raw material with a higher copper content than the ore of northern India could provide. While this source provides evidence of another source of copper imports to India, the letters are from the twelfth century, near the end of Chola rule. Additionally, the letter seems to be an example of labor outsourcing to a factory making utilitarian objects, and processional bronzes would never be made in such an environment. Chola bronzes require the artistry of a master craftsman, a *sthapati*, precisely trained for the sculpting of processional bronzes. The production of these images also requires a brahman to bless and lather the bronze at various stages of creation. General metal factory workers were not equipped nor allowed to construct such a venerated image.

One final possibility for sourcing copper, and the source Dehejia seems to favor, is Sri Lanka. Scholar Arjuna Thantilage has researched the Seruwila copper deposits of northwestern Sri Lanka. The Cholas were known to have campaigned and controlled Sri Lanka from around 998, so Dehejia postulates that perhaps the copper deposits of Sri Lanka were one of the reasons

[44] "What is the Cairo Geniza?" Princeton University, Accessed January 18, 2022, https://genizalab.princeton.edu/about/what-cairo-geniza.

[45] Goitein, *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 192-195. Goitein, *India traders of the Middle Ages: Documents From the Cairo Geniza: India book, part one,* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2008), 564-567.

the Cholas were interested in controlling the island.[46] Additionally, Thantilage found evidence of extraction in the Seruwila copper deposits in two distinct phases from the fourth century BCE to the eleventh century CE.[47] Even more compelling is Thantilage's evidence for the processing of already extracted copper through the thirteenth century, aligning well with Chola reign.[48] Additionally, scholars are certain that Sri Lankan copper was exported thanks to the testimony of inscriptions, but unfortunately the inscriptions do not detail the destination of the exported copper.[49] Where the theory of Sri Lankan source copper falls short is the current impossibility of scientifically verifying Seruwila in Sri Lanka as the location of source copper. The difficulty lies with international logistics and the frequent inconclusiveness of inductively coupled plasma testing, the test necessary to verify Seruwila as the source.[50]

Thus, despite Dehejia's best efforts, it is still impossible to definitively identify the copper source for Chola bronzes. While Dehejia seems to remain hopeful, some metallurgists expressed to her that due to the frequent variance of trace elements within the same deposits, "pinpointing the source of an ore is a near impossibility".[51] This inconclusiveness, however, does not distract from the fact that in 855 there was a known switch from constructing wooden processional images to processional images made of bronze and this switch necessitated access to copper ore or was occasioned by new access to copper deposits.

Production and Ritual Establishment of Processional Bronzes

While information on the source metal is inconclusive, knowledge of the production process and ritual establishment of Chola bronzes is robust, partially due to the fact that a nearly

[46] Dehejia, *The Thief Who Stole my Heart,* 26, 172.
[47] Dehejia, *The Thief Who Stole my Heart,* 26.
[48] Dehejia, *The Thief Who Stole my Heart,* 26.
[49] Dehejia, *The Thief Who Stole my Heart,* 26.
[50] Dehejia, *The Thief Who Stole my Heart,* 26.
[51] Dehejia, *The Thief Who Stole my Heart,* 27; and 292n43.

identical method is used today as Dehejia illustrates.[52] The process of ritual establishment focuses on the "material substance of the icon and on the human activities necessary to make it fit for divine entry."[53] Therefore, ritual establishment for processional bronzes starts with the selection of materials. Metals were seen as powerful and treated with great respect.[54] A medieval guide to metalwork, the *Manasara*, describes the appropriate alloys, metallurgy, and iconography for the builder.[55] The sculptors of processional bronzes are called *sthapathis,* and the job is hereditary.[56] The production method of processional icons is called the lost wax technique which results in unique, solid cast bronzes. First, *sthapathis* construct individual body parts such as a torso, arms, legs, and heads out of a mixture of beeswax and resin. The pieces are placed in a cold water bath to harden the wax and preserve the sculpting. When pieces need to be joined, the bordering sides are warmed enough to be malleable and joined together using hollow tubes. Each tiny detail down to the clasp of a necklace is first sculpted out of wax using a wooden chisel.[57] Once the full wax model is complete and cooled in a water bath it is meticulously layered in clay. It is the first layer specifically that must be perfectly smooth in order to produce a bronze with crisp details; as a result, only the most experienced *sthapathis* apply this layer.[58] After encasing the wax model in clay, it is fired. In the next step, wax melts and is guided out of the clay mold through a hole left in the clay encasing. The wax model is melted completely; no identical bronze can be casted again. The result from the firing is a hollow clay mold. From this point, bronze is created by combining tin, lead, and copper and is poured into the clay mold. After days of allowing the metal to cool, the clay mold is broken to reveal the bronze within. Once the

[52] Dehejia, *The Thief Who Stole my Heart,* 30-32.
[53] Davis, *Lives of Indian Images*, 34.
[54] Guy, *"Parading the Gods: Bronze Devotional Images of Chola South India,"* 21.
[55] Guy, *"Parading the Gods: Bronze Devotional Images of Chola South India,"* 21.
[56] Nagaswamy, "On Dating South Indian Bronzes," 108.
[57] Dehejia, *The Thief Who Stole my Heart,* 30.
[58] Dehejia, *The Thief Who Stole my Heart,* 30.

bronze is released from the clay mold, Chola artisans complete only a minimum of cold cleaning to finish the production process.[59] The tubes added for joining support are chiseled off from the icon's body and the physical production is complete.

Once the bronze body of the image is complete the ritual establishment of the bronze continues to prepare the bronze to be inhabited by a deity. When the *sthapathi* has completed the wax model, a priest wraps the model in cloth, “places it on a bed of grain and sacrificial grass, honors it with a series of oblations, and recites the mantra evoking the deity over it.”[60] This process is repeated by the priest after the sculptor encases the wax model in clay. When the mold is broken open to release the bronze the priest immediately begins recitations identifying the god who will inhabit it.[61] In the words of Davis,“there is never a time when the image exists as an unconsecrated object; its very coming into being is within ritual”.[62]

The third stage of ritual establishment is the opening of the eyes. The bronze is placed upon a pedestal and the *sthapathis* incises the eyes into the bronze and with this action, starts its life. The bronze then has an auspicious bounty placed in front of its pedestal, including ghee, honey, grain, and brahmans reciting praises.[63] The priest washes the icon with natural materials such as clay, ashes, and cow products before dressing the icon and adorning it lavishly. The image is next taken to circumambulate the temple before being allowed to rest in water for as many as nine nights.[64] The final phase of establishment is the affusion, the act of lathering the image in quality substances to consecrate the image.[65] The final product of ritual establishment is

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[59] Dehejia, “Chola Bronzes: How, When, and Why,” 12.
[60] Davis, *Lives of Indian Images,* 35.
[61] Davis, *Lives of Indian Images,* 35.
[62] Davis, *Lives of Indian Images,* 35.
[63] Davis, *Lives of Indian Images,* 35.
[64] Davis, *Lives of Indian Images,* 36.
[65] Davis, *Lives of Indian Images,* 36.

a bronze, appropriately physically and ritually produced, and equipped to be a dwelling for a deity.

Notes on Dating

Vidya Dehejia ends her article, "Chola Bronzes: How, When, and Why" with a call for future scholars to publish on the dating, regional identity, and proportional significance of Chola bronzes.[66] She issues this call because the current scholarship leaves many questions on these topics. The first foundational text on dating Chola bronzes, *Early Chola Bronzes* by Douglas Barrett, was published in 1965. Barrett used temple inscriptions and comparison to date bronzes from the early Chola period 850-985. R. Nagaswamy's 1995 essay, "On Dating South Indian Bronzes" builds upon Barrett's work with new knowledge garnered from the rediscovery of Chola bronzes that bore dates on their pedestals.[67] Though not yet a widely used method for dating Chola bronzes, Sheridan Srinivasan has brought scientific methods into the discussion. Srinivasan used similarities in the chemical fingerprint of 130 bronzes to group them together based upon shared sources of metal. Then, with the help of stylistic observations, Srinivasan attempted to place these groupings in chronological order.[68]

There are thus three current methods for dating Chola bronzes. The most secure method is dating a bronze based upon an inscribed production date on the base. If a bronze is inscribed yet a date is missing, the second method of paleography – the study and dating of writing styles and scripts – can be employed to date the inscription.[69] However, base inscriptions are a rare though fruitful feature on a Chola bronze. Thus in the absence of a base inscription, scholars may

[66] Dehejia, "Chola Bronzes: How, When, and Why," 27.
[67] Nagaswamy, R, "On Dating South Indian Bronzes" in In*dian Art & Connoisseurship: Essays in Honor of Douglas Barrett,* ed. John Guy (Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts in association with Mapin Publishing), 1995), 102.
[68] Sheridan Srinivasan, "Dating the Nataraja Dance Icon: Technical Insights," *Marg: a Magazine of the Arts,* 52 no. 4 (June 2001): 56.
[69] Nagaswamy, R, "On Dating South Indian Bronzes," 102.

turn to temple wall inscriptions as a dating method. Almost every temple built during the Chola empire has inscriptions often recording temple maintenance, accounting, and festival performances.[70] These inscriptions are most helpful in dating when they record the date of temple construction and the donation of bronze processional icons.

The third method for dating Chola bronzes is comparison. In comparing bronzes, the goal is to identify stylistic trends and changes over the four centuries of Chola rule in order to narrow down a production date. This method is most productive when an undated bronze can be compared to bronzes with a secured date from either base or temple inscription. Using comparison as a tool for dating Chola bronzes presents issues regarding its approximate nature and the variants that account for stylistic differences unrelated to the production date. One such variant is the *sthapatis* themselves; the hand of the artist will always create stylistic difference, especially in a process as individualistic as lost wax. Also, we must consider that some artists are exceptionally talented, while others are mediocre; further, some bronzes had repairs made in the centuries after their production, therefore complicating their dating.[71]Another variant is stylistic differences between Chola regions. Dehejia has begun to distinguish the stylistic differences between bronzes made in four different Chola regions.[72] The largest issue with using comparison as a dating tool lies in the fact that many dates attributed to Chola bronzes are informed estimates. Therefore, using a bronze with an estimated date as a comparison to date another bronze leaves a large margin for error. The solution is to use an inscribed bronze as the comparison tool to minimize this margin; however, inscribed bronzes are limited. Even so, without scientific methods or an inscription, using the comparison method with inscribed

[70] Dehejia, "Chola Bronzes: How, When, and Why," 27.
[71] Nagaswamy, "On Dating South Indian Bronzes," 102.
[72] Dehejia, "Chola Bronzes: How, When, and Why," 22.

bronzes is the most secure method to date the MCCM bronze as will be discussed later in the chapter.

Value in India

With this background of Chola processional bronzes established, we can now turn our attention to evaluating the MCCM Balakrishna bronze as it was seen in Chola society in terms of its religious, material, political, and economic values. At its most basic religious function, this bronze was created and consecrated as a temporary and portable dwelling for Balakrishna. The sculpture's figure, adornments, and ritual establishment make this bronze an appropriate home for the deity. The figural beauty of Balakrishna is the obligatory starting place for constructing a suitable bronze. Balakrishna's body is not meant to realistically portray a young boy; rather, it is an idealized version of a young boy, fit for a god. His body is smooth and perfectly rounded with no signs of the awkwardness of a growing body. Yet the figure remains youthful thanks to its face and small proportions. In Hindu tradition, the perfection of Balakrishna's bodily form reflects his spiritual perfection.[73]

Furthermore, body ornamentation is an element of bodily perfection and considered auspicious and necessary for the dwelling of a deity.[74] To be without adornment is to invite misfortune.[75] The head, torso, arms, legs, and hands, of our Balakrishna are richly, yet elegantly, adorned. The idealized and adorned form of Balakrishna is beautiful and religiously required for a dwelling for Balakrisnha therefore, aesthetic beauty is an element of the religious value of the bronze. To be a proper participant in these rituals, the bronze must be beautifully adorned and ritually established.

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[73] Vidya Dehejia, "The Thief Who Stole my Heart: The Material Life of Sacred Bronzes from Chola India, 855-1280, Part 6," (A. W. Mellon Lecture in the Fine Arts, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. May 6th, 2016), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vsJSOYz9y4Y.
[74] Dehejia, *Thief Who Stole My Heart,* 28.
[75] Joyce Burkhalter Flueckiger, *Material Acts in Everyday Hindu Worlds,*(Albany: State University of New York Press, 2020,) 22.

Once the bronze was a fully consecrated dwelling for Balakrishna, it began to be valued as a means to fulfill religious duties. Two central aspects of Hindu ritual that the MCCM bronze took part in were *pūjā,* defined broadly as acts of worship, and *darána,* defined broadly as seeing.[76] *Pūjā* was performed on the bronze through the latherings, offerings, and adornments it enjoyed in temple rituals. When the MCCM bronze was processed outside temple grounds it was participating in a moment of darána. Festival participants are not just seeing a statue, they are seeing Balakrishna the deity. Providing a means for Hindus to perform pūjā and darśana is the bronze's religious value.

Bringing the Balakrishna bronze outside temple grounds and processing the icon through the streets brings the deity to a new audience. Some of these processions happened each day, while others happened weekly or annually.[77] In the case of festival processions, the bronze was valued for its ability to fulfill the reciprocal relationship of devotees processing and adorning the god, therefore pleasing Balakrishna, which then reflected auspiciously back on the devotee. Scholars have talked about processions of deities democratizing worship and as a "moment of inclusion" since access inside temples was restricted based upon class.[78] It is true that more people were able to interact with the deity when it journeyed outside the temple, but even outside the temple access to the deity was not egalitarian and still depended on societal divisions. In the twelfth century, a Shaiva mendicant and religious teacher Aghorasiva composed the *Mahotavavidhi*, or "Procedures for the Great Festival" where he detailed for priests how all the components of a Shaiva festival should operate.[79] Although this text is a Shaiva manual and possibly written before the production of the MCCM bronze, it gives a sense for how the bronze

[76] Diana L. Eck. *Darśan: Seeing the Divine Image in India*, (New York: Columbia University Press: 1985), 3; and Davis, *Lives of Indian Images, 19*.
[77] Dehejia, "Chola Bronzes: How, When, and Why," 13.
[78] Guy,*"Parading the Gods: Bronze Devotional Images of Chola South India,"* 18; and Richard Davis, *A Priest's Guide for the Great Festival: Aghrotasiva's Mahotsavidhi.* (Oxford University Press, 2010), 31.
[79] Davis, *A Priest's Guide for the Great Festival.*

may have been used in festival proceedings. Aghorasiva dictates who gets to stand closest to the processing deity, and the order of those who follow. The chief priest and ruler get to stand side by side with the image; in front march the entertainment, primarily musicians and dancers; Brahmins follow the deity reciting the Vedas, a collection of hymns that inform Hinduism.[80] Those closest to the deity enjoy a high status, while those on the lower tiers of society, the same groups unable to access Balakrishna within the temple, are relegated down the procession, away from the deity. Attending a festival might be more inclusive than a temple setting but the value of processing this Balakrishna bronze lies more in its ability to bring the deity to a wider audience and to bring more attention to the temple than to make the viewing of Balakrishna equitable.

The festival procession of this Balakrishna is directly responsible for economic stimulation, generating revenue for the temple and the priest. The preparations and proceedings of a procession required the participation of many members of society who benefited financially. Food was distributed to festival participants, roads were widened and even constructed to process the deity, and the temple and the priests reaped great financial gain from donations.[81] Aghorasiva explains, "The patron worships the priest, then gives him an honorarium – he should give him cows, land, gold, jewels, cloth, and other valuables."[82] Priests were also processed, similar to the deities, to their home at the end of festivals.[83] The home temple of the deity received financial donations which served to grow and improve the temple.[84] In these ways, the festival procession of our Balakrishna bronze fulfilled religious duties while proving economically and materially beneficial for priests, the temple, and festival participants.

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[80] Davis, *A Priest's Guide for the Great Festival,* 51.
[81] Dehejia, *Thief Who Stole My Heart,*18.
[82] Davis, *A Priest's Guide for the Great Festival,* 123.
[83] Davis, *A Priest's Guide for the Great Festival,* 124.
[84] Dehejia, *Thief Who Stole my Heart,*18.

The material value of this Balakrishna bronze begs the question: what value did the Cholas see in using bronze to produce their processional images? In choosing to make the shift from wooden to bronze processional images in around 855, the Cholas and their predecessors, the Pallavas, must have considered the monetary and material value of bronze.[85] However, this is secondary to its durability. The previous wooden images required frequent replacement because wood, as a material, cannot withstand the frequent latherings processional images enjoy. Bronze images manage bathing much better than wood, and while details of the casting become worn down over time, they retain a pleasant polish and can be retouched. The durability is an excellent reason for processional images to be made out of bronze.

The MCCM bronze also presented an opportunity for royalty and commoners to advance their political standing. Donations of all sorts, in money, land, and jewelry, were made by citizens to temples prompted by religious piety and the desire to receive *mariyatai,* or temple honors.[86] Donating a processional image was a way to receive temple honors, which translated into social prestige. The finer the donation, the more socially connected one becomes to the deity. If donated by royalty, the MCCM bronze served to validate royal rule and to sustain a positive political image with the citizens. Royal donations reminded Chola citizens of their battlefield success, the excellence of their leader, and cultivated cultural pride. A king's donation to a temple brought him closer to the deity further underscoring his right to authority and political status. Therefore, for royalty or commoners, patronizing the MCCM bronze served the political function of amassing social capital.

Cultural Biography Part I: Life as a Processional Bronze

[85] Dehejia, "The Thief Who Stole my Heart: The Material Life of Sacred Bronzes from Chola India, 855-1280, Part 1," A. W. Mellon Lecture in the Fine Arts, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. May 6th, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jjyjEVLIswA.

[86] Dehejia, "Chola Bronzes: How, When, and Why," 18.

Based upon historical knowledge of Chola processional bronzes, Balakrishna, and the sources of value of a bronze like ours, we can now reconstruct a speculative cultural biography of the bronze's life from production through ritual use. When it comes to the dating of the MCCM bronze, we should start with the 10th-century. While Krishna has been a popular Hindu deity since at least the turn of the first millennium, the composition of the *Mahabharata* and its appendix, the *Harimvamsapurana*, in addition to the *Bhagavata Purana,* composed around the 10th-century CE, popularized Balakrishna.[87] Art historical evidence also supports a 10th century date for the popularization of Balakrishna as this is when the first images of the young deity were created.[88] However, Balakrishna images from the 10th century are more rudimentary than the MCCM bronze. Their legs are not as perfectly rounded. They are adorned in less detail, and their bodies are not as effortlessly proportioned.[89] Thus, when estimating a production date for the MCCM bronze, an eleventh century date is most appropriate for the beginning of the object's chronological range.

The proposed date range for the bronze by the Carlos Museum is between the 11th and the 13th-century.[90] This chronology aligns with the fall of the Chola Empire and comfortably dates the MCCM bronze as later Chola. This date is also based on the information the museum received from the auction house where it was purchased.[91] While this date is plausible, it is also a date of convenience to place the MCCM bronze in the Chola era and to overlap with Sotheby's dates. A later production date, between the 14th and 16th-century is not out of the question.

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[87] Ravi Gupta and Kenneth Valpey, *The Bhagavata Purana: Sacred Text and Living Tradition,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 2.

[88] Pratapaditya Pal, *Asian Art at the Norton Simon Museum Volume I: Art From the Indian Subcontinent*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press in Association with The Norton Simon Art Foundation, 2003), 251.

[89] Douglas Barrett, *Early Chola Bronzes,* (Bombay: Bhulabhai Memorial Institute, 1965), plate 95. Image in Appendix I.

[90] "Dancing Balakrishna" Michael C. Carlos Museum, Accessed December 3rd, 2021, https://collections.carlos.emory.edu/objects/7126/dancing-balakrishna?ctx=195c2cb6d0669d36b09e5ec0220e06d41d2a28be&idx=0.

[91] Sotheby's, *Indian and Southeast Asian Art: Auction in New York, 22 September 2000,* lot 148.

Multiple museums hold bronzes dated to the 14 to 16th century that are stylistically similar to the MCCM bronze yet their proposed production dates are post Chola.[92] The rich artistic legacy of the Cholas was appreciated by following dynasties thus images could have been made post Chola that call back to the popular Chola style. Additionally, it is unfortunately true that these museums could also be basing their dates upon uncertainty. Assigning a date by comparison bases the dating completely on the form of the bronze. The form of an object reveals the style of the object but not necessarily the identity of the maker. A close examination of Chola bronzes reveals that the construction of the lotus pedestal, Balakrishna's torso adornments, and the elegant detail of the position are similar to other bronzes dated to the 12th and 13th-centuries. However since there is no evidence of the bronze before September 2000, what can be deduced is the bronze was made by 2000 in a Chola style similar to that of the 12th and 13th centuries. Since the MCCM bronze is in the style of a later Chola bronze, a reconstruction of life for a processional bronze in that time remains productive because no matter the production date of the bronze, it is calling back to later Chola times.

A patron set out to donate a Balakrishna bronze to a Vishnu temple. The patron, either royalty or wealthy commoner, knew the temple needed processional images of Balakrishna for smaller daily processions around the temple grounds and for festivals such as Janmashtami, the annual celebration of Krishna's birth. Our patron was interested in donating to a Vaishnavite temple, in a predominantly Shaivite time and place. The bronze had the potential to confer religiosity and political affluence upon its donor. Donating the MCCM bronze could help an individual receive the god's goodwill for constructing a temporary dwelling for Balakrishna, the

[92] *God Krishna Dancing on the Head of the Snake Demon Kaliya (Kaliyadamana),* 14th century 67.5 × 28.6 × 21.7 cm, Bronze, Chicago, The Art Institute of Chicago, https://www.artic.edu/artworks/136981/god-krishna-dancing-on-the-head-of-the-snake-demon-kaliya-kaliyadamana; and *Figure,* 16th century, 66 cm, bronze, London, The Victoria and Albert Museum, https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O60203/figure-unknown/.

vessel that allows Balakrishna to extend his life beyond the temple, to be seen by many, processed at festivals, and to receive offerings and adornments. Donating such a bronze could also gain an individual respect in the community. It is a show of wealth and power and a means to turn those qualities into social prestige. Beyond the respect of the community, the donor had the possibility of receiving temple honors; this was an asset more impressive than personal wealth and could contribute to the social status of their entire family.

Once our donor had the idea to donate a Balakrishna bronze they began working with the temple and the *sthapathi* to produce the bronze from material selection through ritual establishment. Tin ore was extracted, most likely from Taku Pa in southern Thailand, and Chola merchants acquired the tin and shipped it back to Southern India where it arrived in a workshop.[93] Also in this workshop would have been copper ore from an unknown location. What is known about this copper is that it did not come from India. If it came from nearby, it was extracted in Sri Lanka, but it could have arrived as scraps from as far as Aden. Beeswax and resin were locally sourced and these raw materials were presented to the *sthapathi.*

The *sthapathi* began to sculpt a wax model of the MCCM Balakrishna following proportional and aesthetic ideals. The *sthapathi* sculpted the body in parts, focusing on the balance in opposition of the body position of Balakrishna. One arm outstretched while the opposite leg is lifted, the MCCM bronze was sculpted to look gracefully in motion. To adorn these graceful limbs, the *sthapathi* sculpted each bead of the jewelry out of wax. Each limb, the torso, and the head of the MCCM Balakrishna has beaded elements.The model was then covered in a thin layer of clay. The first layer was applied with sharp detail to ensure each crevice of the wax model's details – the curls of his headdress, the beads adorning his ankles and wrists, the

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[93] Dehejia, *Thief Who Stole My Heart,* 28.

engravings on his hands – would be precisely translated into clay.[94] After the meticulous application of the first layer, thicker layers of clay were applied until the model of the MCCM bronze was entirely encased. Throughout this process, the Balakrishna model was passed to a priest who swaddled and washed the wax as it evoked the deity. When fired, the liquified wax flowed out of a hole left in the clay mold and the clay hardened. When the clay emerged from its firing, its Balakrishna shaped cavity was filled with liquid copper and small quantities of tin and lead mixed at the perfect temperature. The process required artistic and technical skill to ensure that every crevice was filled by bronze and no air bubbles were trapped.

The metal cooled for several days in the mold until an artist started to chip away at the clay with a hammer revealing the metal image. Again, the bronze was handed to a priest who recited the mantra invoking Balakrishna, identifying the bronze as a new dwelling for the deity. In the final step of physical production, the MCCM bronze "was awoken" by the *sthapathi* incising the circles of his eyes. Once open, the priest applied unguents to Balakrishna's eyes and displayed the deity before "ghee, a pot of honey, heaps of grain, brahmans reciting praises, virgins, in full decoration, and the assembled crowd of devotees".[95] The MCCM Balakrishna was then bathed and purified by a priest in a mixture of clay, ashes, and cow manure before he was dressed and adorned in clothes and garlands.[96] Adorned and ready to be seen, the MCCM Balakrishna was taken on his first procession around the community. Although the bronze had already made his village debut, his ritual establishment was not complete at this point. Balakrishna enjoyed a nine night rest in water to elevate the image to the level of purity needed for the last phase of ritual establishment.[97]

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[94] Dehejia, *Thief Who Stole my Heart,* 30.
[95] Davis, *Lives of Indian Images,* 36.
[96] Davis, *Lives of Indian Images,* 36.
[97] Davis, *Lives of Indian Images,* 36.

In the final phase, Brahmans feasted and Balakrishna was bathed and dressed. The priest performed affusions on the MCCM Balakrishna by lathering the image in all the auspicious substances of the world: mud from lotus ponds, the five products of the cow, water infused with gold, banyan trees, fig, and acacia.[98] This bathing unfolded to the sounds of instruments, the registration of hymns, and the affirmation of devotees.[99] Upon the completion of these affirmations, Balakrishna was carried into the temple for the first time, installed in its place, and dressed, bathed, and adorned once again. Once in the temple and lavishly adorned, a priest performed *puja* on our Balakrishna for the first time. At this point, the ritual establishment of the MCCM bronze was completed and it became a proper dwelling for Balakrishna.

Recognized as a fully consecrated image, the MCCM Balakrishna bronze was an active part of temple rituals. He participated in daily temple worship, received offerings, and priests performed *puja* on the MCCM bronze. Balakrishna sustained his public persona through rounds of the temple grounds in the morning. These excursions from the temple involved less fanfare than the annual festival of *Janmashtami* for Krishna's birthday, where the MCCM bronze would have been the central god.

Festivals such as these inspired a massive economic stimulus as well as an opportunity for political advancement of individuals. Performers were able to elevate their wealth and status; temples received enough donations to expand; perhaps infrastructure was improved to accommodate the festival that community members then enjoyed year round. Priests received donations and a procession of their own at the close of the festival. Participants in the MCCM Balakrishna's festival gained wealth or political status, or, in the case of temples and priests, they advanced in both categories.

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[98] David, *Lives of Indian Images,* 36.
[99] David, *Lives of Indian Images*, 36.

While the MCCM Balakrishna was in temple worship, the donor was enjoying the honor brought to their family. Perhaps the auspicious gift of the MCCM Balakrishna brought the donor even more financial good fortune, as temple honors were known to bring.[100] The donor and their family also enjoyed an elevated status amongst the community and the political power that comes with great honor. The donor and their family were not alone in reaping monetary and political value from the MCCM Balakrishna. Those who participated in the procession of the MCCM bronze, especially those allowed to walk close to the deity, collected social and economic benefits from the procession of the MCCM bronze.[101]

The MCCM Balakrishna bronze carried on in its life as a home for a venerated deity. It received donations and adornments. Priests performed puja upon the MCCM bronze. It participated in processions both big and small. In the temple setting, the bronze maintained its exchangeability making it a commodity, however it was enclaved by the temple's intentions to keep the bronze in ritual use. Appadurai explains the enclaved state as a commodity that is shielded from immediate exchange.[102] In this case, the temple's intent to continue using the MCCM bronze as a dwelling for Balakrishna was the shield from exchange that enclaved the bronze.

In the lives of Chola bronzes, some stay in temple worship while others leave the temple setting. One common reason for leaving the temple setting is burial as a means to protect the image from the threat of looting or destruction. Bronzes that remain in temple worship enjoy the bathing and lathering of priests and now appear worn down and their features imprecise. Indeed, they have a shiny brown color to them, darker than the hue of the MCCM bronze. Our Balakrishna appears much closer to bronzes that were removed from their temple setting and

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[100] Dehejia, *Thief Who Stole My Heart,* 18.
[101] Davis, *A Priest's Guide for the Great Festival,* 31.
[102] Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," 22.

buried for protection. So, perhaps at some point after enjoying life as a temple image, the MCCM bronze was buried by priests to protect the images from the looting or destruction of invading forces. One instance of conflict known to cause the burial of bronzes were the 1310 invasions by the Delhi Sultanate.[103] Another common way processional bronzes left the temple setting was being taken away as loot. Looting of Indian images was conducted by neighboring kings to exercise political dominance and by foreign invaders such as the Delhi Sultanate or the British.[104] Different looters may have acted with different goals in mind; to seize objects that reflect sovereignty or simply to appropriate objects made of valuable materials which could then be liquidated into their raw value. The MCCM bronze could have been subject to looting of either intention.

There is no evidence as to how the MCCM bronze left the temple setting but it clearly possesses the green patina characteristic of buried bronzes. This patina is acquired by the metal oxidizing after prolonged exposure to moisture. The details of the MCCM bronze's facial features and beading have remained precise over the centuries. Some bronzes discovered outside of the temple setting were ritually reestablished and integrated back into temple worship. Others, however, continued on a life outside of temple worship. The precise features of the MCCM Balakrishna suggest that the bronze left the temple setting and did not return. Once the MCCM Balakrishna left his temple setting he eventually became destined for a life overseas.

[103] Dehejia, *The Thief Who Stole My Heart,* 262.
[104] Finbarr B. Flood, *Objects of Translation: Material Culture and Medieval "Hindu-Muslim" Encounter* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), 125.

Chapter 2: Life in a Private Collection

This chapter focuses on Joseph R. Belmont's collection and how the MCCM bronze's association with the Belmont name affected its life journey. It places Belmont's collection in the context of Indian art's presence in Europe. It also relates it to a shift in the reception of objects, which went from being perceived as ethnographic material to being valued as works of art in the first half of the 20th century. This chapter traces the MCCM bronze through primary sources from 1966 to 2000. The soundness of some of these sources is questioned as is the MCCM bronze's place in the Belmont collection. Processional bronzes, when in the Belmont collection or any other European milieu, and away from their temple setting, are subject to a new regime of value where their meaning is no longer provided by their ability to process a deity but rather their status as an enclaved commodity in the hands of connoisseurs.

South Asian Art in Europe

In 1498, Vasco De Gama of Portugal landed in Calicut (Kozhikode) marking the beginning of the European incursion into the Indian Ocean.[105] The Portuguese were there to establish Indian Ocean trade dominance but they were not the only ones. The Ottomans were the first to challenge this Portuguese mission but the creation of the East India Company by the English and the Dutch East India Company in the first years of the seventeenth century posed the greatest opposition to the Portuguese.[106] During the 16th and 17th centuries the Portuguese,

[105] Edward A. Alpers, *The Indian Ocean In World History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 67.
[106] Alpers, *The Indian Ocean In World History,* 81.

British, Dutch, and indigenous people of the Indian subcontinent were all working to drive trade and create monopolies in the Indian Ocean.[107] Conversely, While their dominance over India and Indian ocean trade was far from established in the 16th and 17th centuries, the British emerged as decisive collectors of Indian art in the 18th century.

One of the best documented South Asian objects to reach Europe in the 16th century is a carved ivory box sent by King Bhuvaneka Bahu of the Kingdom of Kotte in Sri Lanka to the King of Portugal before 1543.[108] This object represents two important points that must be made about South Asian objects in Europe. While this is one example of a South Asian object landing in the possession of a European, it took many more years before the first targeted collections of South Asian art were formed. Although the King of Portugal received this box, he was not a collector of South Asian art; that phenomenon did not begin until the 17th century. Moreover, most South Asain objects in this early phase of transmission, were not religious in nature but rather represented luxury goods to be cherished in elite settings.

It was rare for South Asian religious sculpture to appear in Europe in the 17th century. According to Davis, this is because generally, the British did not want to impose upon Hindu practices and many religious objects were still in use. Additionally, some Indian religious figures are heavy sculptures or stone carvings in walls, materials very difficult to transport. Importantly, at this moment in history, Indian religious sculptures would not have been seen as art, or something worthy of collecting.[109] The famous exception to this disinterest in religious statues is the statue of the Hindu god Vishnu collection by William Hedges, Governor of East India Company in Bengal. In 1686, Hedges donated the Pala Dynasty Vishnu statue to the Ashmolean

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[107] Alpers, *The Indian Ocean In World History,* 81-95.

[108] Robert Skelton, "Indian Art and Artefacts in Early European Collecting," in *The Origins of Museums: the Cabinet of Curiosities In Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century Europe*, ed Oliver Impey and Author MacGregor, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 275.

[109] Davis, *Lives of Indian Images,* 159.

Museum, stating he acquired the statue from Sagar Island in West Bengal. This was the first Indian sculpture to enter a European museum and can still be seen at the Ashmolean Museum today (LI894.12).[110]

Though it was the first Indian religious sculpture to enter a European museum, it was not the first South Asian religious sculpture to enter a prominent English private collection. A 1638 inventory of King Charles I's (r. 1625-1649) royal collection notes, "an east Indian Idoll of black brasse which was by my Lord Denby taken out of there [sic] churches from there [sic] altar".[111] Though this quote imposes Christian terms upon Hindu temples, the inventory is noting a South Asian religious sculpture in the King of England's collection by 1638. Today this sculpture's whereabouts are unknown and it is even unclear whether it has survived at all. Oliver Miller details the fate of Charles I's collection during the English Civil War that ended his reign. Items in the king's collection were sold or destroyed by parliament at the end of his reign and after his death what survived of his collection was stashed away to be forgotten.[112]

The Vishnu sculpture of the Ashmolean Museum and the "Indian Idoll of black brasse" of Charles I are exceptions to the general European approach to South Asian art in the 17th century, since they are both sculptures and religious images. Early European interest in South Asian art was primarily focused on works on paper. Though these South Asian sculptures were deliberately collected, when they first reached their new British homes, they were the only examples of South Asian sculpture in their respective collections. Instead of these objects representing an attempt to build South Asian collections, they are examples of a 17th century shift that introduced a new life path for South Asian objects: one in which they were removed

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[110] "Indian and Southeast Asia Collection," Ashmolean Museum, Accessed, February 6, 2022, https://www.ashmolean.org/india-and-southeast-asia.
[111] Oliver Millar, "Abraham Van Der Doort's Catalogue of the Collections of Charles I," *The Volume of the Walpole Society* 37 (1958): 94.
[112] Oliver Millar, "Inventories and Valuations of the Kings Goods 1649-1651," *The Volume of the Walpole Society* 43, (1972): xi-xiv.

from South Asia, transported to Europe, and displayed as exotic curiosities in private collections or public museums.[113]

<u>Early Collectors of Indian Art</u>

By the mid 18th century, the English East India company had emerged as the dominant power in the Indian Ocean and 1757 marked the beginning of British Colonial rule in India.[114] Due to this colonizing presence, some of the early European individuals to form collections of Indian art were British. Among the British in India, military personnel and colonial officers had objects most accessible to them through wartime loot, gift giving, theft, and purchase.[115]

Among early collectors, their reasons for collecting varied. Richard Johnson (1753-1807), a British colonial administrator and one of the most avid collectors of South Asian art in the 18th century, was motivated to collect by an interest in South Asian languages, culture, religion, and history. Like most 18th century collectors of Indian art, Johnson focused on manuscripts and miniature paintings. Their abundance and transportability made them desirable to Europeans as did their digestible subject matter.[116] Johnson focused his painting collection on portraits of Indian kings and nobles, a subject he would have been familiar with, as well as religious scenes, cultural dress, and customs, topics of interest for a colonial administrator.[117] Johnson and other British collectors were also drawn to miniature paintings because they could easily recognize the fine craftsmanship required to produce such detailed scenes. Johnson believed his collection of South Asian paintings and manuscripts was an educational resource for learning about the region and would help the British understand how to further exert their control over India.[118]

[113] Davis, *Lives of Indian Images,*145.
[114] Alpers, *The Indian Ocean In World History,* 97-98.
[115] Davis, *Lives of Indian Images,* 157.
[116] Davis, *Lives of Indian Images,*159.
[117] Toby Falk, *Indian Miniatures in the India Office Library,* (Delhi & Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1981), 26.
[118] Davis, *Lives of Indian Images,*159.

The first collection of Indian religious sculpture put on display in Britain was that of Bombay stationed writer, James Forbes (1823-1904).[119] Forbes was one of the first British men to recognize the possibility of taking Indian religious statues from their temple settings, where they were idols, and display them outside of a religious context as works of art.[120] Though he adored his Indian sculptures, they were not universally well received when he brought them home to England.[121] For Forbes, the main incentive for creating his collection of Indian sculptures was their personal significance as they served as memorabilia from his years abroad.

None of the early collectors of Indian art were motivated by monetary gain, as collecting Indian art was not a lucrative financial investment. A collection of Indian art now called the Bridge Collection and on display at the British Museum illustrates the low financial valuation of Indian art in the first half of the 19th century. The collection started with Major-General Charles Stuart (1758-1828) who was stationed in India beginning in 1777.[122] Stuart lived and worked in India for nearly fifty years, during which he amassed a marvelous collection of Indian sculpture.[123] Upon his death, most of his collection was sold through Christie's and purchased by John Bridge in 1830.[124] Bridge displayed the collection in his home until his death when it was auctioned again and this time acquired by Keeper of British Antiquities at the British Museum, Augustus Wollaston Franks, who purchased the collection "for a nominal sum said to be five pounds".[125] Today this collection is considered a treasure of the British Museum.

The 20th Century and The "Taxonomic Shift"

[119] Davis, *Lives of Indian Images,* 160.
[120] Davis, *Lives of Indian Images,* 163.
[121] Davis, *Lives of Indian Images,* 163.
[122] Marjorie Caygill, *Treasures of the British Museum*, (London: British Museum Press, 2009), 69.
[123] Davis, *Lives of Indian Images,* 164.
[124] Caygill, *Treasures of the British Museum*, 69.
[125] Davis, *Lives of Indian Images.* 165

Davis identified a 17th-century shift that saw South Asian objects brought to Europe for the purpose of display.[126] The 20th century saw what anthropologist James Clifford refers to as a "taxonomic shift" of Indian objects from curiosities into art.[127] This reclassification has affected how Indian objects are displayed, interpreted, and exchanged by Euro-America. Davis identifies the writings of Ernest Binfield Havell and Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy in the early 1910's as the beginning of this shift, and the installation of *The Art of India and Pakistan* at the Royal Academy of Arts in London in 1947-1948 as the completion of this transformation.[128]

Davis argues that this shift between the 1910s and 1947 was supported by the larger cultural phenomenon of Indophilia.[129] Indophilia is the fascination with and often appropriation of South Asian cultures and traditions beginning in the 20th century.[130] This manifested itself in different ways including the claim of certain Indian customs as the precursor to European traditions. One example is the argument that ancient Greek art took inspiration from Ghandaran artistic traditions.[131] But, while certain aspects of Indian culture were adopted, others were pointedly rejected, namely aspects that were seen as stemming from industrialization and were therefore inauthentic.[132] The cultural backdrop of Indophilia allowed accepted aspects of Indian art, such as images of the Buddha, to appeal to the British public.

In 1908, Havell published the book *Indian Sculpture and Paintings*. It is just one of his publications that sets out to refute the disparaging notions of Indian art held by the British and to

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[126] Davis, *Lives of Indian Images,* 177.
[127] James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art,* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 196; and Davis, *Lives of Indian Images,* 176.
[128] Davis, *Lives of Indian Images,* 177.
[129] Davis, *Lives of Indian Images,* 177.
[130] Douglas McGetchin, *Indology, Indomania, and Orientalism: Ancient India's Rebirth In Modern Germany*, (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2009), 18.
[131] Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, "The Origin of the Buddha Image," *The Art Bulletin* 9, no. 4 (1927): 287-329.
[132] Davis, *Lives of Indian Images,*177.

teach a new framework for the British to view Indian art.[133] Havell recognized that Indian objects did not align with British sensibilities or value system for art, so he selectively emphasized or concealed certain aspects of Indian artistic tradition in order to maximize its chance of public acceptance in Britain. With each aspect of Indian art that Havell introduces to his audience, he compares it to an established feature of European fine art. When laying his groundwork for how European viewers should evaluate the beauty of the human body in Indian art, for instance, he begins by making a comparison that comforts his audience: "the Greek, when he attempted to realize the divine ideal, took for his model a type of physical beauty, such as the athlete or the warrior. The Indian always takes the yogi, the religious devotee".[134] This comparison technique allowed Havell to accomplish his goals of simultaneously vindicating Indian art and educating the British public. First, he familiarized his audience with aspects of Indian art through a comparison with which they were comfortable: the idea of bodily perfection. Then he highlighted the justifications for the cultural discrepancies, for instance explaining why the body of a yogi had as much cultural significance in India as an accomplished athlete did in Greece. In this way he systematically created a new framework for the British to evaluate Indian art, though this method emphasized the differences between Indian and European art.

Ceylon-born, British-educated Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy (1877-1947) made it his life's work to educate Europe and America about Indian art. Starting in the early 1910s Coomaraswamy began publishing widely on Indian art and philosophy. He was ardently against industrialization and colonization and responds directly to these institutions in his writing.[135] His writing takes both a philosophical and pedagogical approach as he serves as a native interpreter

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[133] E. B. Havell, *Indian Sculpture and Painting: Illustrated by Typical Masterpieces, with an Explanation of Their Motives and Ideals*, (London: John Murray, 1908).
[134] Havell, *Indian Sculpture and Painting,* 26.
[135] Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, "What Has India Contributed to Human Welfare?" in *The Dance of Shiva: Fourteen Indian Essays,* (New Delhi: Sagar Publications,1968), 21.

for Indian art, history, and philosophy to Euro-America. When Coomaraswamy noticed publications that misunderstood Indian art portraying images with many arms, his writing provided a new lens to view these images. Viewers should "endeavor to take for granted whatever the artist takes for granted, No motif appears bizarre to those who have been familiar with it for generations," says Coomaraswamy.[136] At times his essays were much more introductory, breaking down the Hindu understanding of art into its history and aesthetics, a format that Belmont follows in his 1964 publication on Indian art.[137] Through his publications and his position as Curator of Indian Art at the MFA Boston, Coomaraswamy dedicated his career to exposing Europe and America to Indian art and providing the population with interpretive tools.

The introduction to the 1947- 1948 London exhibition, *Art of India and Pakistan* catalog argues that the study of Indian objects should be focused on "the thing itself".[138] This new understanding of Indian objects is what Davis points to as the end of the "taxonomic shift" from ethnographic objects to art that Indian objects experienced in the first half of the 20th century.[139] The exhibit featured loans from British museums, Indian museums, and private collections that were divided into three sections: sculpture, painting, and textiles and the minor arts.[140] After the transformation launched by Havell and Coomaraswmay, each of these objects was presented with the inherent value assigned to art as opposed to relying upon the exoticism of Indian objects

[136] Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, "Indian Images with Many Arms," in *The Dance of Shiva: Fourteen Indian Essays*, (New Delhi: Sagar Publications,1968), 84.
[137] Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, "Hindu view of Art: Historical," in *The Dance of Shiva: Fourteen Indian Essays,* (New Delhi: Sagar Publications,1968); and Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, "Hindu View of Art: Theory of Beauty," in *The Dance of Shiva: Fourteen Indian Essays,* (New Delhi: Sagar Publications,1968); and, Josef Remigius Belmont, "Die Indische Kunst und ihre Religiösen Hintergründe," *Symbolon: Jahrnbucn Für Symbolforschung* Band 4, 1964: 197-217.
[138] Codrington, K. de B, "Sculpture," in *The Art of India and Pakistan: a Commemorative Catalog of the Exhibition Held At the Royal Academy of Arts, London, 1947-1948,* Edited by Leigh Ashton, (New York: Coward-McCann, 1949), 3.
[139] Davis, *Lives of Indian Images,* 177.
[140] Codrington, K. de B, "Sculpture," in *The Art of India and Pakistan,* table of contents.

to justify their display. Joseph R. Belmont followed this model of exhibiting Indian objects when he lent objects from his Indian art collection to a 1966 German exhibition.

Following the Primary Sources: The Question of the Belmont Collection

In provenance research, any source that documents an object in place and time is considered a primary source: exhibition catalogs, auction catalogs, museum records, private collection records, interpersonal correspondence, and import-export records. For the MCCM bronze, there at first appear to be four such sources: the 1966 *Indische Kunst* exhibition catalog, the 2000 Sothebys Indian and Southeast Asian Art auction catalog, a handwritten note from the consignor of the bronze to Sotheby's, and the 8283 tax documents submitted to the Carlos Museum. The following section traces the MCCM bronze through these primary sources.

In 2001, the MCCM bronze was accessioned into the museum's collection. A 8283 noncash charitable contribution tax form documents the donation of the bronze from the Nathan Rubin Ida - Ladd Family Foundation to the Michael C. Carlos Museum of Emory University as a donation to a charitable organization. The bronze was assessed by an art appraiser and declared to be of good quality and condition. The 8283 form also identifies that the MCCM bronze was purchased at a Sotheby's auction.

This auction is the September 22, 2000, Sotheby's New York sale of Indian and Southeast Asian Art where the MCCM bronze was sold as lot 148.[141] According to the Sotheby's catalog, the MCCM bronze was previously in the Belmont collection, Switzerland, and was exhibited in Württembergische Kunstverein, Stuttgart, January 20 - March 14, 1966 and in Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, Hamburg, 1966.[142] Significantly, the Sotheby's catalog measures the MCCM bronze at 46.6 cm.

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[141] Sotheby's, *Indian and Southeast Asian Art: Auction in New York, 22 September 2000, lot 148.*
[142] Sotheby's *Indian and Southeast Asian Art,* lot 148.

The German institutions mentioned in the Sotheby's entry were the two locations of the 1966 exhibition titled *Indische Kunst* which has an accompanying catalog. The *Indische Kunst* catalog indicates that "Bronze-figuren," or bronze figures, correspond to catalog numbers 93-127.[143] The bronze figures section includes 34 objects; out of these 34 bronzes, 25 are listed as coming from the Belmont Collection.[144] Of these 25 Belmont bronzes, only two are Balakrishna bronzes, catalog numbers 111 and 117.[145]

The tombstone for catalog number 111 gives the name of the bronze in this exhibition, "Bala-Krsna (der Knabe Krsna)", German for 'young Krishna'.[146] It lists the material as bronze, the height as 37.7 cm, and specifies that the object is in the later Chola style, from the Madras state around the 13th century. The last sentence in the tombstone identifies Belmont as the lender of the bronze to this exhibition. The second Balakrishna bronze listed as being lent from Belmont, catalog number 117, is identified as 54 cm, from the Madras state, and in the later Vijayanagar style (Vijayanagar Empire 1336-1614).[147]

Our bronze measures 46.3 cm high, not quite 46.6 as noted in the Sotheby's auction catalog but within an acceptable margin of error. It does not, however, match the height of either Belmont Balakrishnas in the *Indische Kunst* catalog. When it comes to measuring statues, it is standard practice to measure the entire object, from bottom of the base to top of the head; but, there is room for human error. The possibility of the measurements in the catalog not including Balakrishna's lotus base has been taken into account, but a 8.6 cm and 7.7 cm difference is simply too much of a discrepancy to excuse and even excluding the base, these measurements do not match.

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[143] Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, *Indische Kunst,* (Hamburg: Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, 1966), Table of contents.
[144] Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, *Indische Kunst,* Kat. Nrm. 93-127.
[145] Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, *Indische Kunst,* Kat. Nrm. 111 and 117.
[146] Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, *Indische Kunst,* Kat. Nrm. 111.
[147] Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, *Indische Kunst,* Kat. Nrm. 117.

Bronze 117, measured at 54 cm, is one of the few objects pictured in the back of the catalog.[148] The image and measurements clearly conclude this is not the bronze currently at the Carlos Museum. Bronze 111 is not pictured but lot 123 from a Sotheby's February 27, 1967 auction of the Belmont collection matches the dimensions and description.[149] The bronze was identified as a 13th century figure of Krishna from Madras, exhibited in *Indische Kunst*, Cat no. 111, from the Belmont collection, and measured at 39.4 cm. The measurements have about a two centimeter discrepancy which is acceptable. The confirmation through height and image that *Indische Kunst* bronze 117 is not the MCCM bronze, and the matching of bronze 111 to a bronze in the February 1967 Sotheby's auction makes it unlikely that the MCCM bronze appeared in the 1966 *Indische Kunst* exhibition.

This means that the 2000 Sotheby's catalog was incorrect in the exhibition history of the MCCM bronze. When asked via email, Sotheby's disclosed that their evidence for placing the MCCM bronze in the Belmont collection and in the *Indische Kunst* exhibition is a handwritten note from the consignor that identifies the bronze as ex-Belmont collection and exhibited as catalog number 111 from *Indische Kunst*.[150] When Sotheby's received this note, it was not heavily scrutinized because the MCCM bronze aligns well with the profile of the Belmont collection. Additionally Sotheby's does not, and cannot with their limited manpower, fully investigate every provenance claim it receives. Especially in 2000, with provenance of Asian objects far from prioritized, the note was enough to attach the Belmont name to the bronze and accept it for auction.

The first known instance of the Belmont name attached to the MCCM bronze is the handwritten letter from the anonymous consignor in 2000. We have no way of knowing if this is

[148] Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, *Indische Kunst,* 42.
[149] Sotheby's, *A Collection of Indian Sculpture,* Auction in London, 27-28th February, 1967, lot 123.
[150] Allison Rabinowitz, email with Annie Shanley, March 14, 2022.

the origin of this association but either in this note, or sometime before, the MCCM bronze was confused, by accident or by design, for a similar Balakrishna statue that was exhibited as catalog number 111 in *Indische Kunst* and identified as a part of the Belmont collection. By comparing the measurements of the MCCM bronze and *Indische Kunst* bronze 111, we can conclude these are, in fact, not the same object. While there is no definitive evidence the MCCM bronze was never in the Belmont collection, the chain of evidence linking the bronze to Belmont has been disrupted. Therefore, it is unlikely that our bronze was a part of the Belmont collection nor was it in *Indische Kunst*. However it has enjoyed the monetary, cultural, and social benefits that come with the Belmont name and this association has shaped the life of the MCCM bronze for at least the past twenty years.

Joseph R. Belmont Biography and Collection

Joseph Remigius Belmont (1896-1981) was born in Schwyz, Switzerland and lived in Bombay as an employee of Volkert Brothers, a Swiss commodity trading company, from 1920 to 1940.[151] While in India, Belmont accumulated an impressive collection of Indian art, and specifically a leading collection of Chola bronzes. In 1941, Belmont became manager of the Baloise Marine Insurance Company located in Switzerland and moved his residence to Benningen, a small town just outside of Basel.[152] Once he returned to Switzerland, Belmont became involved in the Basel arts and culture community. From 1947-1960, Belmont served as a member of the Museum Commission of the Museum of Ethnology and the Swiss Museum of Folklore and was president of this commission beginning in 1950.[153] Beginning in 1957, Belmont

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[151] Miriam Baumeister, "Joseph Belmont," *Personenlexikon Des Kantons Basel-landschaft,* Accessed January 23 2022,
https://personenlexikon-bl-ch.translate.goog/Josef_Belmont?_x_tr_sl=de&_x_tr_tl=en&_x_tr_hl=en&_x_tr_pto=op,sc.
[152] "The Swiss merchant fleet," *Schweizerische Versicherungs-Zeitschrift,* Vol. 19, No. 6 (1951): 192–196.
[153] Miriam Baumeister, "Joseph Belmont," *Personenlexikon Des Kantons Basel-landschaft,* Accessed January 23 2022,

became president of the Association of Friends of the Art Museum and Co-Founder of the Swiss Indian Society.[154] His deep involvement in the Basel museum community was not limited to Indian art as Belmont was also a collector of "new Swiss art," and his two collections became known within the Basel art community.[155] In 1955, he was appointed to the Royal Council of the Netherlands in Basel, a position which he held until his retirement in 1966.[156]

Also in 1966, Belmont sent 25 of his Chola bronzes along with 17 other Indian objects to be displayed in the *Indische Kunst* exhibition. Belmont and his collection gained international recognition through display in Germany and also by working with other institutions who lent objects to the show such as The Victoria and Albert Museum and the Indian art museum of Calcutta.[157] For his expertise in Indian art, contributions to Swiss culture, and professional service, Belmont was awarded an honorary doctorate of philosophy in 1961 by the University of Basel.[158]

After his retirement in 1966, Belmont sought to liquidate his collection to financially assist his nephew and enlisted the help of his friend Samuel Eilenberg (1913-1998).[159] Eilenberg, a Columbia University professor of mathematics and formidable collector of Asian art, introduced Belmont to Asian art dealer Robert Ellsworth (1929-2014).[160] With this introduction, Belmont's name and collection entered into the circles of the most prominent Asian art actors in the United States. Ellsworth's collecting obsession began with Ming Dynasty furniture when he

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https://personenlexikon-bl-ch.translate.goog/Josef_Belmont?_x_tr_sl=de&_x_tr_tl=en&_x_tr_hl=en&_x_tr_pto=op,sc.
[154] Baumeister, "Joseph Belmont".
[155]"Dr. phil. h. c. Joseph Remigius Belmon,." *Basler Volksblatt,* November 19, 1960.
[156] Baumeister, "Joseph Belmont".
[157] Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, *Indische Kunst,* Leihgeber.
[158]"Dr Phil. hc Joseph Remigius Belmont," *Basler Volksblatt,* November 19, 1960.
[159] Pratapaditya Pal, "The Quiet Collector and the Sensuous Immortals" *Asianart.com,* January 28, 2021, https://www.asianart.com/articles/humann/index.html.
[160] Pratapaditya Pal, "The Last of the Mohicans: Remembering Robert Ellsworth (1929-2014)," *Asianart.com*, September 14, 2014, https://www.asianart.com/articles/ellsworth/index.html#11.

was a teenager, and over the decades leading American museums and private collectors became his clients.[161] One such client and friend was Christian Humann (c.1929-1981) whose collection would go on to be called the Pan-Asian Collection due to its vast scope, geographically and temporally, as well as Humann's desire for his name to remain relatively inconspicuous.

A central actor in the world of South Asian art in America is scholar and curator Pratapaditya Pal. Appointed curator of Indian Art at the Museum of Fine Arts Boston in 1967, Pal then moved to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Norton Simon Museum, and then The Art Institute of Chicago. During his career Pal has become acquainted with the biggest names in Asian art in the United States and organized large traveling exhibitions, including The *Sensuous Immortals: A Selection of Sculptures from the Pan-Asian Collection.* Though Pal is now retired, he continues to write about art, the friends he met, and the memories he retains. Thus it is in an article Pal wrote just after the death of his friend and colleague Samuel Eilenberg, and his article about Christian Humann's collecting history that Pal mentions Joseph Belmont and how his life intersected with Asian art actors in America.[162]

With Belmont ready to sell his collection, Eilenberg made the introduction between Belmont and Ellsworth. Ellsworth was interested in the collection and convinced Humann to lend him the funds for the transaction under the condition that Humann would have first pick from the Belmont Collection.[163] Thus, Belmont was able to liquidate his collection: one portion was sold at Sotheby's, one portion went to Ellsworth, and another group of objects went to Humann.[164] At Sotheby's, at least 144 objects from the Belmont collection were sold in a February 27th - 28th 1967 sale in New York City titled *A Collection of Indian Sculpture*.[165]

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[161] The Nelson Atkins Museum of Art, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Cleveland Museum of Art, The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.
[162] Pal, "The Last of the Mohicans" and Pal, "The Quiet Collector".
[163] Pal, "The Last of the Mohicans".
[164] Pal, "The Last of the Mohicans" and Pal, "The Quiet Collector".
[165] Sotheby's, *A Collection of Indian Sculpture,* Auction in London, 27-28th February, 1967.

Tracing the Belmont collection after this three-way dispersal becomes more difficult. Sotheby's chooses not to disclose information about their buyers, so tracing the portion sold at auction becomes more complicated. As an art dealer, Ellsworth's aim was to disperse Belmont objects to private collections and museums. In one example, Ellsworth sold one of Belmont's most extraordinary bronzes, a 10th or 11th century bronze of Krishna dancing on Kalia, to John D. Rockefeller III (1906-1978).[166] Upon the death of Humann, some ex-Belmont objects came into Ellsworth's possession once again. When Humann died in 1981, Robert Ellsworth purchased the 1,600 object Pan-Asian Collection for about $12 million.[167] Therefore, the pieces from the Belmont collection that Humann acquired in the late 1960s were now in Ellsworth's possession. Over the next few years, Ellsworth set to work dispersing the Pan-Asian collection (including its ex-Belmont objects) through museum donations, sales to private collectors, and sales at auction.[168]

Today, the Belmont collection is completely dispersed. Having first been dispersed into three directions – auction, Humann, and Ellsworth – it is now scattered across museums and private collections. The Pan-Asian collection, whose dispersal spread the riches of the Belmont collection even further, is also now separated. The provenance line of Belmont to Ellsworth to Humann, or a variation thereof, can be seen as documented provenance for many South Asian objects in American museums. Though the MCCM bronze was never displayed in the *Indische Kunst* exhibition and it was likely never a part of the Belmont collection, it benefits from the esteem this association produces through the central role Belmont played in the Basel arts and

[166] Pal, "The Last of the Mohicans" and "Krishna Dancing On Kaliya (Kaliyamarddaka Krishna)" The Asia Society, accessed February 6th, 2022, http://museum.asiasociety.org/collection/explore/1979-022-krishna-dancing-on-kaliya-kaliyamarddaka-krishna.
[167] Rita Rief, "Auctions: Asian Gods in Stone", *New York Times,* July 27, 1990, https://www.nytimes.com/1990/07/27/arts/auctions.html.
[168] Rita Rief, "Auctions: Asian Gods in Stone", *New York Times,* July 27, 1990, https://www.nytimes.com/1990/07/27/arts/auctions.html.

culture community, the international recognition *Indische Kunst* brought the Belmont collection, and the high profile names who bought the collection during its dispersal.

Value in a Private Collection

When the MCCM bronze was with the anonymous consigner, it existed within a new regime of value than that of the temple setting. As Appadurai explains, exchange of a commodity across cultures, as has happened with the MCCM bronze, does not necessitate the same construction of value in each culture. Instead the construction of value is rebuilt within the new cultural context.[169] In a private collection the MCCM bronze has left the Hindu temple regime of value behind and a new regime is constructed.

It is unknown how the consignor of the MCCM bronze acquired the object. But they either believed the bronze to be assigned the Belmont collection or they designed the attribution. In either case, the bronze enjoyed the value attributed to Belmont objects. Additionally, while in the consignors' possession, the bronze entered a new cultural context, outside of a temple setting and likely outside of India, the bronze's value was rebuilt as it served a new purpose in a private collection.

The MCCM bronze gained cultural value through the individual and institutions with which it was affiliated. The MCCM bronze was affiliated with Joseph R. Belmont, an association which increased its value thanks to Belmont's established status as a collector of Indian art in Switzerland and his local expertise on the subject. Belmont established himself as an expert of Indian art in Basel and gained titles to support his expertise: honorary doctorates and senior museum positions. He published his knowledge of Indian art and local newspapers published details of his life and collection, broadening his notoriety.

[169] Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," 15.

Owning an Indian art collection was part of Belmont's social capital. Acquiring objects was a sign of disposable income and of the luxury to spend it on art. Therefore, for those who saw the Belmont collection, it was a reminder of his elevated social status in Basel. Another valuable trait that Belmont claimed thanks to his collection was that of a traveled and worldly man. Further, his interest in Indian art was cultivated through time spent in India. Perhaps on a personal note, Belmont valued his collection as memorabilia from his days abroad. Regardless of whether Belmont was a sentimental man, owning an impressive collection of South Asian art elevated his social capital in Basel.

The social capital that his collection added to the Belmont name helped him attain his position on the Museum Commission of the Museum of Ethnology and the Swiss Museum of Folklife. This social capital must also have contributed to his promotion to chair of this commission. Belmont's elevated status helped him gain leadership roles within the Basel museum community. The higher status Belmont achieved the more cultural value the MCCM bronze acquires.

Having the *Indische Kunst* exhibition in its biography also increases the cultural and art historical value of the MCCM bronze. By establishing himself as an expert of Indian art, publishing his knowledge, exhibiting parts of his collection, and holding senior positions within the museum community, Belmont allowed his collection to gain cultural significance in the European art world. The MCCM bronze enjoys cultural, social, and art historical value from association with Belmont and his accolades. Additional cultural value is drawn from being associated with the other objects in the Belmont collection which captured the attention of Sotheby's, Humann, and Ellsworth. Although likely not a Belmont bronze, the MCCM bronze reaped all the benefits of Belmont's prestige.

Similar to how Belmont's collection earned him social capital, owning the MCCM bronze gained the anonymous consinger social capital. Beyond the Belmont association, the MCCM bronze may have been precious to the consignor due to its aesthetic value which is underscored by its alignment with Belmont's aesthetic assessment of Indian art and Chola bronzes that he outlines in his 1964 article "Die Indische Kunst und ihre Religiösen Hintergründe".[170] Belmont published this article in a Swiss journal for the study of symbols, in this case investigating symbols in Indian art and religion. He was viewed as an authority on the topic as a connoisseur of Indian art. Belmont started his article by establishing the historical value of Indian sculpture saying it has been a continuous tradition for two millennia.[171] He then grounded this long tradition in religion, establishing the value of Chola bronzes as cult images.[172] It is this religious context, he explained, that set the aesthetic standards for processional bronze. He singled out two periods he finds particularly aesthetically pleasing: the art of the Gupta period and bronze statues of the Chola period.[173] In writing about Chola bronzes, Belmont pointed to the lost-wax production technique and the resulting individuality of each statue as a source of value for the MCCM bronze.

Belmont's aesthetic valuation of Chola bronzes was high as he called them "the most beautiful that has ever been produced in Indian metal sculpture".[174] He qualified this aesthetic value, recognizing its cultural specificity, and picked a Dancing Nataraja Chola bronze as the example to publish in this article as he deemed it " the most beautiful and easiest to comprehend representation of an Indian deity" for a European.[175] Belmont's aesthetic assessment of Chola

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[170] Josef Remigius Belmont, "Die Indische Kunst und ihre Religiösen Hintergründe,", *Symbolon: Jahrnbucn Für Symbolforschung* Band 4, 1964: 197-217.
[171] Belmont,"Die Indische Kunst und ihre Religiösen Hintergründe," 197.
[172] Belmont, "Die Indische Kunst und ihre Religiösen Hintergründe," 198.
[173] Belmont, "Die Indische Kunst und ihre Religiösen Hintergründe," 207, 214.
[174] Belmont, "Die Indische Kunst und ihre Religiösen Hintergründe," 216.
[175] Belmont, "Die Indische Kunst und ihre Religiösen Hintergründe," 216.

bronzes took into account Hindu texts as the basis of the aesthetic choices made by the artist. He thus connected the aesthetic value of processional bronzes to their adherence to religious guidelines, the long and continuous history of bronze casting in India, and the way they could both embody these aesthetic values and please the 20th century European eye. The MCCM bronze adheres to all of Belmont's views on aesthetic value of Chola bronzes which is one reason why it is believable the statue could have belonged to the Belmont collection. Additionally, adhering to Belmonts aesthetic guidelines is confirmation of the aesthetic value of the MCCM bronze.

Though likely never in the Belmont collection, the MCCM bronze was in the collection of the anonymous consignor, where it became a commodity by metamorphosis.[176] The MCCM bronze was not produced to be a commodity, yet due to the phenomenon of collecting Indian religious art that began with the British, the MCCM bronze was placed in the commodity state. When Belmont acquired his collection, his objects became enclaved commodities: objects that retain exchangeability yet are shielded from imminent exchange. Indeed, Belmont's desire to retain objects within his collection shielded them from imminent exchange. We know the MCCM bronze may have been a commodity by metamorphosis when it entered the consigners collection but there is no way of knowing if it was enclaved or not. Was the cosigner an art dealer who was constantly looking to buy and sell art? In which case the MCCM bronze would have stayed in a highly commoditized state, always a prospect for exchange. But if the consignor was a collector who, like Belmont, wished to retain their objects for the foreseeable future the MCCM bronze would have been enclaved in the consignor's possession.

Cultural Biography Part II: Life in a Private Collection

[176] Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," 16.

When we left the MCCM bronze in Chapter one, it was a ritually established processional bronze in a Hindu temple around the thirteenth century. We may never know how, but a sequence of circumstances led the MCCM bronze to leave the temple setting. Whatever caused the MCCM bronze to leave the temple setting was the first of many diversions from the path of a temple icon that the MCCM bronze experienced. Appadurai defines the life of a commodity as a "shifting compromise between socially regulated paths and competitively inspired diversions."[177] This exit from temple life is an example of a diversion that Appadurai calls "commoditization by diversion."[178] Outside of the temple, the MCCM bronze's commodity state was intensified due to its commodity candidacy meeting the commodity context. Thus it was acquired by a private individual, though likely not Belmont.

To enter this private collection, the MCCM bronze likely had to travel. A moment which emphasized the material durability and portability value of the bronze. India did not establish laws on the import and export of cultural heritage until 1958. However, if the MCCM bronze was buried, it would have qualified as treasure, under the Indian Treasure Trove Act of 1878, a British colonial law that is still technically in force.[179] This law declares "anything of any value hidden in the soil" treasure, and if found it must be reported to the appropriate government employee.[180] Whether this procedure was enacted for the MCCM bronze, will likely never be known. However, without cultural heritage laws the MCCM bronze was able to leave India without hassle.

In 1966, 42 objects from the Belmont collection made the journey to Germany to be displayed in the *Indische Kunst* exhibition. Though the MCCM bronze was not a participant in

[177]Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," 17.
[178]Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," 28.
[179]"Indian Treasure Trove Act of 1878," February 12, 1878, https://www.indiaculture.nic.in/sites/default/files/Legislations/9.pdf.
[180]"Indian Treasure Trove Act of 1878," February 12, 1878, https://www.indiaculture.nic.in/sites/default/files/Legislations/9.pdf.

this exhibit, it remains an important part of the bronze's biography as one of the two displayed dancing Balakrishna bronzes, catalog number 111, goes on to be confused by accident or by design for the MCCM bronze. Though the MCCM bronze did not participate in this traveling exhibition, it has been published as displayed in *Indische Kunst* so nevertheless it enjoys the international notoriety of being a part of such an exhibit.

After 1966, Belmont sought to liquidate his collection. The four directions in which he split his collection were previously discussed. One bronze went to John D. Rockefeller III, at least 144 were sold at Sotheby's, some objects went to Robert Ellsworth, and others to Christian Humann. The MCCM bronze however, is unlikely to have participated in this split. The prestige of these art market names displaying interest in the Belmont collection intensifies the cultural value of the MCCM Balakrishna bronze.

In 2000, the anonymous individual who owned the MCCM bronze was ready to sell. The consignor sought Sotheby's auction as the means of sale. When consigning the bronze to Sotheby's the individual sent a hand written letter identifying the MCCM bronze as ex-Belmont collection and as Catalog number 111 in the *Indische Kunst* exhibition. Whether the consigner truly believed this association to be true, or it was designed to increase market value, this association remained with the bronze for at least 22 years and greatly influenced its time on the art market.

Chapter 3: Life on the Art Market

Chapter three follows the MCCM bronze through the American art market and as a proposed acquisition to the Michael C. Carlos museum by Robert Walzer and the Nathan Rubin - Ida Ladd Family Foundation. In this phase the MCCM bronze is in a highly commoditized state where exchange is imminent. This chapter discusses the unique regime of value constructed by Sotheby's for the bronze and the individuals interested in buying it.

Robert Walzer and the Nathan Rubin - Ida Ladd Family Foundation.

On September 22, 2000 our dancing Balakrishna appeared in Sotheby's New York sale of Indian and Southeast Asian art.[181] It was purchased by the Nathan Rubin-Ida Ladd Family Foundation, directed by Robert Walzer, and donated to the Michael C. Carlos Museum of Emory University in 2001. The Carlos Museum received a total of 42 objects donated by the Nathan Rubin-Ida Ladd Family Foundation or Robert Walzer between the years 2000 and 2002, though 18 of those objects have since been deaccessioned, meaning they are no longer a part of the Museum's collection.[182] Walzer was on the advisory board of the Carlos museum from 2000-2003 but was also a donor to a number of other museums during this time.[183]

One such museum is the National Gallery of Australia, which returned 14 illicit objects to India in 2021 which included objects previously with Walzer and the Nathan Rubin - Ida Ladd Family Foundation.[184] Thirteen of the returned objects passed through art dealer Subhash Kapoor who was arrested in 2011 and remains in prison while he awaits trial in India. The Manhattan District Attorney has requested the extradition of Kapoor to the United States where he faces "86

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[181] Sotheby's, *Indian and Southeast Asian Art: Auction in New York, 22 September 2000,* lot 148.

[182] Annie Shanley, email with the author, February 21, 2021.

[183] See Appendix II for list of Museums with Objects from the Nathan Rubin Ida Ladd Family Foundation.

[184] Taylor Dafoe, "The National Gallery of Australia Returns to India 13 More Works Bought From Now Imprisoned Art Dealer Subhash Kapoor," *Artnet,* July 29, 2021, https://news.artnet.com/art-world/national-gallery-australia-returning-14-pieces-looted-art-india-1993764.

criminal counts of grand larceny, possession of stolen property, and conspiracy to defraud".[185] Robert Walzer is a known client of Kapoor and purchased from his now defunct gallery "Art of the Past." At least one of the 14 objects identified for return by the National Gallery of Australia was with the Nathan Rubin Ida Ladd Family Foundation before it went to Kapoor and then the National Gallery of Australia.[186] This association caused Indian heritage watchdog groups to investigate the Nathan Rubin Ida Ladd Family Foundation's donations and relationship to Kapoor, calling the purchasing habits of Robert Walzer into question.[187]

There is no evidence that Walzer was aware of the international illicit art machine that Kapoor was running. However, the provenance of Asian objects was not a major concern for the art world when Walzer purchased the MCCM bronze in 2000. Unfortunately, it takes headlining stories such as the National Gallery of Australia returning 14 objects to push the issue of Asian provenance to the forefront of the mind of the art world.

Art Market Value

On the art market the bronze was once again culturally valued for its association with individuals and institutions. Firstly, the Belmont name and the association to Belmont's prestige and the international display of his collection created cultural value. Once Belmont began looking to sell his collection, his name gained more cultural value through its association with Robert Ellsworth, Christian Humann, and John D. Rockefeller III, respected actors in the

[185] Tessa Solomon,"National Gallery of Australia Returns Artifacts Bought From Disgraced Dealer to India," *ARTnews,* July 29, 2021, https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/national-gallery-of-australia-returns-indian-artifacts-subhash-kapoor-1234600261/.
[186] S Vijay Kumar, "How an American Foundation Distributes Stolen Indian Art to the Likes of Yale University," *Swarajya,* August 8, 2021. https://swarajyamag.com/culture/how-an-american-foundation-distributes-stolen-indian-art-to-the-likes-of-yale-university.
[187]S Vijay Kumar, "How an American Foundation Distributes Stolen Indian Art to the Likes of Yale University," *Swarajya.* August 8, 2021, https://swarajyamag.com/culture/how-an-american-foundation-distributes-stolen-indian-art-to-the-likes-of-yale-university.

American Asian art community. Their interest in the Belmont collection increased the cultural value of the MCCM bronze in 2000.

In these associations – to Belmont, Ellsworth, Rockefeller, and Humann – the MCCM bronze reaped the benefits of not only being a solitary item with its own personal value but also as a reported part of a large and respected collection of Asian art. As other objects from Belmont's collection entered esteemed collections, the Belmont name continued to grow and in turn to increase the cultural value of the MCCM bronze. In September 2000, when the MCCM bronze was auctioned at Sotheby's as an individual item, it gained additional cultural value for itself. Sotheby's is trusted by buyers and sellers in the art world to accept only the finest goods. Being accepted to auction and then sold at Sotheby's, one of the largest and most reputable auction houses in the world, added cultural and monetary value as well as a stamp of authenticity to the MCCM bronze.

In a highly commoditized state on the art market, the monetary value of the MCCM bronze became central to its regime of value. To determine the monetary value of the MCCM bronze, we look to Sotheby's. According to the Sotheby's website, the auction house took nine characteristics into account when estimating the dollar amount representing the value of the MCCM bronze: artist or maker, country of origin, provenance, date of execution, materials, dimensions, rarity, subject matter or type, and condition.[188] Sotheby's has identified these indicators as pertinent to calculating the market value of any item consigned to the auction house and the result of this equation for the MCCM bronze is a market estimate of $60,000 - $90,000. For the MCCM bronze, the artist is unidentified, a trait expected for Chola bronzes. The auction house estimates the production range to be the 13th or 14th century.[189] It is thought that the

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[188] "Sell With Sotheby's," Sotheby's, Accessed February 21, 2022, https://www.sothebys.com/en/sell?locale=en.
[189] Sotheby's, *Indian and Southeast Asian Art: Auction in New York, 22 September 2000,* lot 148.

MCCM bronze was created in South India from copper with small amounts of tin and lead. Bronze is a metal alloy valued around the world and must add to the statue's value. However, the figure is relatively small; compared to some Chola bronzes that reach three feet (~91 cm), our 46.4 cm bronze's dimensions are more modest. Estimating the rarity of the MCCM bronze highlights the fact that the lost wax technique yields unique bronzes; there is no other bronze identical to ours. On the other hand, the subject matter was quite popular, and therefore dancing Balakrishna bronzes are found throughout American museums. Additionally, the fact that the MCCM bronze was marketed specifically as a Chola bronze increases the rarity index as Chola bronzes can no longer be produced. By this standard, the MCCM bronze has been rare for centuries because while processional bronzes are still produced, specifically Chola processional bronzes have been out of production for seven hundred years. At the same time, the set pool of Chola bronzes that can be bought diminishes over time as they are purchased and enclaved by collection. The estimated age of the MCCM bronze also contributes to its rarity as the older a bronze, the more rare it is to find it in good condition. And the condition of the MCCM bronze is excellent: it has no scratches, broken pieces, or indentations. The MCCM bronze also boasts the green patina that European and American audiences love in their Chola Bronze statues.[190]

The final parameter Sotheby's took into account when estimating the market value of the MCCM bronze was provenance. Sotheby's listed the MCCM bronze's provenance as the Belmont collection, a fact that increases the market estimate due to the cultural value of the Belmont name. The Belmont name is associated with high quality bronzes that were collected in India by a connoisseur with knowledge of Indian art. His time living in India and articles on Indian art emphasize that if collected by Belmont, the bronze must be an excellent object.

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[190] The green patina can be interpreted as a sign of burial and although it may not be healthy for the metal, a green surface is considered attractive to collectors. Guy, "Parading the Gods," 24.

In addition to this provenance, Sotheby's includes the exhibition history of the *Indische Kunst* exhibit that is now known to be inaccurate The claim that the MCCM bronze was displayed in an international exhibition was also certain to add to its monetary and cultural value. Listing its provenance and exhibition history is also a way for Sotheby's to prove the authenticity of this bronze. Authenticity is not listed as a quality evaluated in the valuation process, but it is assumed that authenticity is a barrier to entry. Telling the history of the MCCM bronze through provenance and exhibition history is subtly authenticating the MCCM bronze.

The $60,000 - $90,000 market estimate for the bronze was based upon unlikely provenance and mistaken exhibition history. If we think for a moment about the MCCM bronze on the art market without ex-Belmont provenance, its worthiness as an art object would remain. Its aesthetic quality and fine craftsmanship is evident regardless of provenance. However, its market estimation would have to be lowered due to the absence of a guarantee of authenticity and cultural value the Belmont name provides. Interestingly, without the story of the Belmont collection leaving India by 1940 there is no clear evidence of the bronze leaving India by 1970. This is the provision laid out by the UNESCO 1970 "Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property" for responsible collecting.[191] However, it is likely this provision would not have been a barrier to auction in 2000 as the provenance of Asian objects was not yet a priority for most art market actors. Therefore, the primary effect of lacking the Belmont provenance on the MCCM in the art market would have been a decrease in its market value.

The final component Sotheby's takes into account when calculating the market estimate of the MCCM bronze is a note in the catalog telling potential buyers to compare the MCCM

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[191] UNESCO, "The 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property," April 24 1970, https://en.unesco.org/fighttrafficking/1970.

bronze with a similar bronze from the Earl Morse Collection sold by the auction house in 1998 in order to justify the market value by comparison.[192] The effectiveness of this comparison is helped by the value of the Earl Morse name in the provenance of the 1998 sale. The Earl Morse bronze sold for $60,000.[193] This concrete comparison of bronzes explains the estimate of $60,000 - $90,000 to the buyer. It proves that there is an active and competitive market for these objects. It is also evidence that people are seeking comparable bronzes and taking them off the market, with each bronze enclaved, the MCCM bronze's rarity increased. With this sale predating the sale of the MCCM bronze by two years, it is a convincing indicator to the buyer that $60,000 is only the minimum of what it could sell for at auction.

With its sale at auction imminent, the MCCM bronze was in a highly commoditized state. The bronze's exchangeability was its most relevant feature while with Sotheby's. In this state, the provenance of the bronze becomes more important as it is used to singal, authenticity, quality, monetary value, social capital, and to build the story of the MCCM bronze. Although likely a false association, the MCCM bronze existed on the art market as ex-Belmont collection.

Cultural Biography Part III: An Art Auction

The 2000 Sotheby's auction of Indian and Southeast Asian art in New York City was the culmination of what was likely months of preparations for what Appaduri calls a "tournaments of value" diversion.[194] The ceremony of a fine art auction fits perfectly into Appadurai's tournaments of value framework: it is a large economic event that occurs at specific times throughout the year.[195] The largest auction houses, such as Sotheby's, keep a habit of having

[192] Sotheby's, *Indian and Southeast Asian Art: Auction in New York, 22 September 2000,* lot 148.
[193] Allison Rabinoqitz, email with the author, March 4, 2022.
[194] Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," 21.
[195] Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," 21.

Southeast Asian art auctions at approximately the same times each year, one of which being Asia Week, which usually occurs at the end of September. Art auctions are distinct economic moments, not common everyday transitions.[196] Participation in an art auction is considered a privilege on the part of the art object, the consignor, and the buyer; participation is a status symbol. And an auction is a contest amongst buyers, vying to outbid their opponents.[197]

First, the MCCM bronze was identified by the consignor, perhaps already a person of some status, as an object they wanted to sell. It was decided that the most suitable way to sell the bronze was through auction at one of the largest and most reputable auction houses in the world: Sotheby's. The MCCM bronze then experienced the slightly complex and economically distinct processes of being consigned to Sotheby's. The bronze's details were provided to Sotheby's: dimensions, provenance, any documentation, and pictures. The MCCM bronze was then reviewed by Sotheby's. It was selected for auction, and Sotheby's calculated its sale estimate of $60,000-$90,000 citing market demand, the rarity of the MCCM bronze, its Belmont collection provenance, the bronze material, its excellent condition, the estimated production date of the 13th century, its relatively small dimensions for a Chola bronze, and popular subject matter.[198] These auction preparations took at least six to eight weeks, and by Friday, September 15th, 2000, the MCCM bronze was on display at Sotheby's New York for buyers to view pre-auction.[199] The bronze was displayed for seven days until September 22, 2000, when the MCCM bronze was sold at auction.[200]

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[196] Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," 21.
[197] Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," 21.
[198] Sotheby's *Indian and Southeast Asian Art,* lot 148.
[199] Sotheby's *Indian and Southeast Asian Art,* title page.
[200] The amount the MCCM bronze was purchased for at auction cannot be shared in this thesis. Though Sotheby's estimated the purchase price to be between $60,000-$90,000, auctions can be unpredictable and items have been known to sell for far more and far less than their estimate.

Given the preparations needed to consign the MCCM bronze at Sotheby's, the auction house has documentation of who consigned the bronze to this auction. Sotheby's does not disclose this information as the auction house has a responsibility to maintain their clients' privacy. While only Sotheby's knows who consigned the MCCM bronze to the September 2000 auction, we do know its buyer: Robert Walzer. This tournament of value diversion placed the MCCM bronze on a new path in its life: it brought it one step closer to becoming a museum object.

In 2000, Robert Walzer was beginning his buying spree of Asian art for the Carlos Museum and purchased the MCCM bronze from Sotheby's on behalf of the Nathan Rubin Ida Ladd Family Foundation. For Robert Walzer the MCCM bronze was a vehicle of political and social advancement. The MCCM bronze was one of his impressive donations that helped him gain trust and a place on the Advisory Board at the Carlos Museum. By donating the MCCM bronze to the museum and continuing to be a patron of a well respected university museum, Walzer was building the political prestige of his name in the art world. Becoming a museum patron is not an easy feat. The Carlos Museum has a vigorous acquisition process that all proposed gifts must navigate.[201] With the MCCM bronze and the Carlos Museum on his resume of donations, Walzer became a more attractive and trusted patron to other museums. Walzer purchased the MCCM bronze with the intention to donate it, and so almost immediately after purchase, in January 2001, the MCCM bronze was accessioned into the Carlos Museum's permanent collection as a gift of the Nathan Rubin-Ida Ladd Family Foundation.

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[201]"Statement on Acquisition Guidelines" Michael C. Carlos Museum, accessed February 21, 2022, https://carlos.emory.edu/acquisition-guidelines.

Chapter 4: Life in The Michael C. Carlos Museum

When the bronze entered the Carlos, it took on a set of roles in the "ritual of the museum." Because the Carlos is a university museum, the historical and religious aspects of the bronze have been highlighted in its display and interpretation. In the context of the museum, these attributes confer an educational value to the image of Balakrishna; this value, in turn, becomes a major aspect of the museum phase of its life. It also plays a part in the ritual action generated by the museum itself. In addition, I argue that in the Carlos museum, the bronze continues to be a religious object. Although it has been removed from a religious setting and transformed into a historical artifact and a work of art, the MCCM bronze retains the potential to be worshiped as a god. In the museum phase, the MCCM bronze has the potential to be understood by different people in different ways.

Museums as Ritual

In her essay, "The Museum as a Way of Seeing," art historian Svetlana Aplers defines "the museum effect – turning all objects into works of art".[202] This effect, she argues, goes without notice or objection when applied to Roman sculpture, Classical Greek vases, Dutch landscapes, American modernist painting; all of these have come to qualify, in European and North American contexts, as "fine art". It is when objects that once would have been defined as "tribal", ethnographic, or anthropological experience the museum effect that debate erupts.[203]

The "museum effect" also comes into play in the discussion about museums as temples, rituals, or religious spaces. Richard Davis equates the result of the museum effect, turning an object into an art object, to a process whereby the object gains a "quasi-religious regard."[204]

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[202] Svetlana Alpers, "The Museum as a way of Seeing," in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display,* eds. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, (Washington & London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 26.
[203] Alpers, "The Museum as a way of Seeing," 26-27.
[204] Davis, *Lives of Indian Images*, 23.

Other scholars have discussed the museum as a temple; rather than employing a narrow definition of religion, these scholars focus on the museum and the actions that it engenders as ritual.[205] I contend that in the Carlos Museum, the MCCM bronze is not in a religious setting or the sacred space of a temple. It is, however, a player in the ritual of the museum.

Carol Duncan argues that each museum is a culturally constructed "ritual site" and that the rituals that occur within museums have three characteristics.[206] First, museums are a distinct space, designated for its ritual to be carried out. This space is used to usher large groups of people through distinctly arranged rooms. There is distinct decorum for the museum space. Sometimes the customs or rules and regulations of that decorum are posted on the walls and other times they are simply enforced by societal pressure to conform. Voices are hushed, food and drink are prohibited, pictures are taken but flash is avoided. The second aspect of the ritual of museums is performance. The museum and its staff "provide the stage, set, and script".[207] The objects are cleaned and conditioned for display, the lights are precisely queued, and didactic text is posted on the walls. But it is the visitor who performs the ritual of walking through the curated galleries of the museum, pausing to look and think. Or pausing to pretend to look and think, in order to maintain the performance! The final aspect of the ritual of the museum is the outcome, or the effect that it has on the visitor's perception and psychological state. In the best of cases, the visitor—who has become a performer—leaves the museum space feeling intellectually stimulated, enlightened in the realms of art and culture, and energized.[208]

The actions and results of a visit to a museum are a ritual. This ritual is not, however, a religious one. Davis suggests that the museum objects involved in this ritual "deserved careful

[205] Chrispin Paine, *Religious Objects in Museums: Private Lives and Public Duties,* (Taylor & Francis Group, 2012), 77. Caron Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums*, (London: Routledge, 1995), 7-20.
[206] Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums*, 7.
[207] Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums*, 12.
[208] Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums*, 10-13.

treatment and were worthy of some special, quasi-religious regard."[209] Crispin Payne discusses the museum as a temple.[210] Both of these arguments are based upon the idea of the museum as ritual, though I disagree with the usage of terms religious and temple to describe the museum as I will explain below.

Duncan and Payne claim that museums are quasi-religious and temple spaces because they possess the first two qualities of ritual spaces that Duncan outlines: distinct spaces and established actions. The authors do not claim that museums are centered on a higher power but according to their definition of religion and temple spaces, that is not a requirement.[211] For this thesis, however, there must be a distinction made between the medieval South Indian temple environment whose main purpose was interacting with, and maintaining good relations to deities, and the museum whose main purpose does not involve serving any deities. The MCCM bronze lived two very different lives in the temple space of South India versus in the modern museum. Ultimately, the difference between the MCCM bronze in the museum and a South Indian temple is not the object itself but the purpose of its environment. In the temple the MCCM bronze was presented as a dwelling for Balakrishna in an environment whose purpose is centered around connecting with the gods. In the Carlos, due to the "museum effect," the MCCM bronze is in a ritual environment whose purpose is to encourage "attentive looking."[212] The effects of this ritual are open-ended and can vary greatly between visitors. For some, this ritual may induce an interaction with a god while for others it sparks a historical inquiry. Thus I return to Duncan's notion of the museum as a ritual. This ritual is distinct in place, actions, and outcome from the rituals that took place in medieval Hindu temples. But nevertheless, when the MCCM bronze

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[209] Davis, *Lives of Indian Images*, 23.
[210] Paine, *Religious Objects in Museums: Private Lives and Public Duties,* 72.
[211] Davis, *Lives of Indian Images*, 25-26.
[212] Alpers, "The Museum as a way of Seeing," 26.

entered the Carlos Museum it once again entered into a ritual setting, but no longer a religious one in the narrow definition of religion as a system focused on human relations with the divine.

Display and Interpretation of the MCCM bronze at the Carlos Museum

The Michael C. Carlos Museum of Emory University "collects, preserves, exhibits, and interprets art and artifacts from antiquity to the present in order to provide unique opportunities for education and enrichment in the community and to promote interdisciplinary teaching and research at Emory University".[213] The Emory University collection dates back to 1876 when it consisted of rocks and gems.[214] It was in the 1980s, however, that the collection was shaped into the museum that it is today and in 1985 the Emory University Museum of Art and Archaeology reopened in a new building designed by renowned architect Michael Graves and centrally located on Emory University's Quadrangle thanks to a $1.5 million gift from Michael C. Carlos.[215]

The Asian collection at the Carlos Museum was initiated in 1894 when Emory acquired Japanese objects from a Methodist missionary. It was not until the 1990s that the Asian collection began to take the shape of what it is now. In 1995, Emory established the program in South Asian Studies and in 1998, the Emory Tibet Partnership.[216] With these teaching focuses established at the university, the museum began acquiring Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain objects.[217]

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[213] Mark Burell et al, *Michael C. Carlos Museum: Highlights of the Collections,* (Michael C. Carlos Museum at Emory University), 5.
[214] Gary Hauk, "The Deer and the Pharaoh: The Emory Museum Celebrates a Hundred Years," *Emory Historian's Blog,* Accessed March 18, 2022, https://emoryhistorian.org/2019/04/30/the-deer-and-the-pharaoh-the-emory-museum-celebrates-a-hundred-years/.
[215] Gary Hauk, "Carlos Museum – The Transformation," *Emory Historian's Blog,* Accessed March 18, 2022, https://emoryhistorian.org/2019/05/30/carlos-museum-the-transformation/.
[216] Burell et al, *Michael C. Carlos Museum: Highlights of the Collections,* 116.
[217] Burell et al, *Michael C. Carlos Museum: Highlights of the Collections*, 116.

The new museum building was designed by prominent American architect, Michael Graves who throughout his career designed notable educational and civic buildings such as the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport in The Hague and the Louwman Museum in The Hague in addition to multiple commissions with Disney.[218] Graves designed Emory's new museum building to seamlessly fit into the already standing architecture on Emory's quad.[219] The museum stands at the same height as the other buildings, the facade is made from the same peach colored marble, and the roof is made of the red shingles classic of Emory. Moreover, The architecture and exhibition design of the Carlos Museum is representative of its collecting areas. The quad facing entrance of the building has pyramids corresponding to the Egyptian collection and columns referencing the Greek and Roman collection. To enter the building from the street side, visitors must walk under a pyramid structure. Even from the facade of the building visitors begin to understand which collections are privileged at the Carlos Museum.

Carol Duncan analyzes which collections the Louvre Museum favors by dissecting the layout of the museum and concludes that museums generally favor the collections in "the most monumental, centrally located spaces and made the museum's opening statements".[220] This same framework can be applied to the Carlos Museum though the scale of the museum is far smaller than the Louvre. Through architectural and design choices, space mandates, and curatorial decisions I argue there is a tiered system of preference given to collecting areas with the Asian collection sitting in the third out of four tiers.

At the Carlos, the opening statements from Greece, Rome, and Egypt are made before the visitor enters the building. When entering the permanent collections, the visitor has a choice: to

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[218] Robin Pogrebin, "Michael Graves, 80, Dies; Postmodernist Designed Towers and Teakettles," *The New York Times,* March 12, 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/13/arts/design/michael-graves-prolific-architect-dies-at-80.html?_r=0.
[219] Burell et al, *Michael C. Carlos Museum: Highlights of the Collections,* 8.
[220] Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums*, 33.

start to the left with art of the Americas, or to start to the right with the Greek and Roman collection. No matter which choice the visitor makes initially, the flow of the museum is constructed so they will always have to walk through the Greek and Roman installation. If the viewer starts left with art of the Americas, the path through the galleries leaves the visitor in Greek and Rome with no choice but to walk through if they wish to view the other collections. To access the Asian collection, the viewer walks through Greek and Rome to a smaller gallery. This path through the museum is reminiscent of the belief that all civilization grew out of ancient Greece and Rome. Another reason for the interconnectedness of the galleries is the fact that the building is restricted in size due to its central location on Emory's campus. So the interior space is maximized to accommodate as many objects and galleries as possible. With its honor of being one of the opening statements, and the design of forcing the viewer to walk through its galleries, the Greek and Roman collection is tiered above all others in the museum.

The Ancient Egyptian, Nubian, and Near Eastern collection is the second tier with its pyramids making an opening statement on both sides of the building and a large footprint in the galleries. The third tier is the Art of the Americas collection. In this gallery Graves designed the ceiling to be a pyramid calling back to the ancient Egyptians. This gallery originally displayed the Egyptian collection however Art of the Americas has now taken over this space. The architectural feature of the pyramid roof gives the first room of the Art of the Americas gallery a high ceiling and an open feel. To use Duncan's words, it is a "monumental" space in the museum.[221] The fourth tier is where we find the Asian collection and the Works on Paper collection. These collections do not make opening statements to visitors and they are assigned smaller galleries. Though intimate gallery spaces can be an advantage and an intentional choice for some collections, Duncan's framework focuses on the order and the grandeur of gallery

[221] Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums*, 33.

space. Both Works on Paper and the Asian galleries are located as offshoots from the centralized Greek and Roman collection. In the fourth, and bottom, tier is the Sub-Saharan Africa collection whose galleries are relegated to an upstairs gallery in the museum, separated from other members of the permanent collection

An interior design feature that runs through many of the galleries at the Carlos Museum are inset display cases. These cases are prevalent in parts of the Art of the Americas, Ancient Greece and Rome, and Ancient Near Eastern, Egyptian, and Nubian galleries. The effect of this design choice is that the viewer sees objects suspended by metal mounts, or placed on shelves set about two feet back from a plex barrier. These cases also create separations within the gallery, and curators have generally followed the design suggestion that each case display a theme. The museum design of inset display cases has long been popular with museums of anthropology and natural history. Art museums, however, prefer to display their objects hung on the walls free of plex shields.[222]

In addition to the tradition of anthropology museums using inset casing there are practical reasons for why Graves chose to design these cases. Much of the Carlos's collection are three dimensional, un-frameable objects which need to be shielded from potential contact with and damage by visitors. In the summer of 2021, the Asian gallery underwent a remodeling and redesign of the displays that demonstrates an alternative to in-set display cases for 3D objects. The Asian gallery presented a problem: the collection had grown and the display needs of the museum had changed, but the size of the gallery could not be expanded. The beautiful and central location of the Carlos Museum on the Emory quadrangle has the downside of restricting

[222] There are some very famous outliers to this general rule. The Mona Lisa is famously behind glass. As are the Obama portraits who are stopped at the High Museum as a part of their national tour as I write this thesis. These outliers are behind (bulletproof) glass because security has deemed them too famous and targeted for their own good.

the museum from expanding its footprint. Thus, even when collections grow, the gallery space most often cannot. Working within this constraint, walls were knocked down to create a more open feel to the gallery though its footprint was not expanded.[223]

This project was managed by Elizabeth Hornor, the Director of Education at the Carlos Museum who worked with Emory faculty members and a graduate student specializing in South Asia to reinstall the gallery. The reinstallation was completed in this manner because there is no Asian art curator at the Carlos. Perhaps another way the museum has not prioritized the Asian collection. However, the Carlos recently received a five year grant from the Humann foundation towards the Asian collection. The first plan for this money is to hire a postdoctoral position to work with the collection.[224] Interestingly, the grant came from the Humann foundation, as in Christian Humann the collector of the Pan-Asain collection from Chapter 3. Although his collection is now dispersed, an interest in Asian art remains in the family and Francis Humann, Christian Humann's nephew, sits on the National Leadership Board of the Carlos Museum and received his bachelor's degree from Emory in 1987.[225]

After the renovation and reinstallation of the Asain collection, the gallery focuses on Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist objects. These include stone carvings, metal figures, and works on paper. Instead of inset cases, the largest objects in the reinstalled Asian gallery sit in wall cut-outs fit to their size. This way, the objects are not protruding, vulnerable to being touched or brushed against, and there is no plex separating these objects from the viewer. The display of statues without wall nooks in the Asian gallery varies. Some are placed on shelves with plex cases, while stone images of the Buddha and a metal relief of Palden Lhamo sit on shelves with

[223] Conversations with Elizabeth Hornor informed my own observations of this renovation.
[224] I thank Elizabeth Hornor for discussing the plans for this grant with me.
[225] "National Leadership Board," Michael C. Carlos Museum, Accessed March 4, 2022, https://carlos.emory.edu/leadership.

no plex cases. The gallery boasts eighteen drawers which can be pulled out to reveal a painting or paintings. Displaying works on paper in drawers protects them from constant light exposure and is a space efficient way to display paintings.

The MCCM bronze stands on a podium under a plex case near the center of the gallery facing the viewer when they enter. The podium allows for a 360 degree viewing of the statue. The stone carvings which are displayed in wall nooks do not need to be seen in the round as they are only carved on one side. The bronze's immediate neighbors in the gallery are other incarnations of Vishnu. First are two large sandstone carvings of Vishnu, one of 18 armed Vishnu from the 11th century and one of Vishnu Sleeping on the Cosmic Ocean from the 11th century. These carvings would not have stood alone, they are individual parts of what would have been a larger wall or monument with carvings. A painting of Vishvarupa: The Cosmic Form of Krishna from the 18th century also surrounds the MCCM bronze. In contrast to the bronze form of Balakrishna, young Krishna, Visharupa is enlarged, revealing the whole universe within him. The next wall surrounding the MCCM bronze contains two Buddhas, another incarnation of Vishnu, one 10th century Pala dynasty carving and one 13th or 14th century Shakyamuni Buddha from Tibet. The first object surrounding the MCCM bronze that is not an incarnation of Vishnu is the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara in the Form of Khasarpana Lokeshvara, a Buddhist meditation deity, from 11th or 12th century India. The final object surrounding the MCCM bronze is a Shiva Linga with Four Faces from 12th or 13th century Nepal that is positioned in the center of the room with deities, including the Balakrishna bronze, surrounding. Positioning the MCCM bronze around the linga draws from the organization of a Hindu temple where a linga is rooted in the center, with everything emanating outwards from the linga.

The display and interpretation of the MCCM bronze concentrate on the historical and religious parts of its identity. The introductory text to the Asian gallery emphasizes the religious nature of many objects within this gallery and invites the visitor to think about the historical positioning of each object in the collection.[226] The label of the bronze itself opens with a statement that encourages intense looking while explaining the subject of the statue.[227] A label is best thought of not as the definitive truth about an object, but rather what the exhibition team wants to communicate about the object.[228] What was chosen to be communicated in the label was a religious and historical contextualization of the adornments and processional purpose of the statue. Choosing to highlight these aspects of the bronze aligns with the teaching happening within the university and the educational mission of the museum.

<u>Carlos Museum Regime of Value</u>

When the bronze entered the Carlos Museum, its educational value became one of its most important assets. The MCCM bronze aligns with areas of interest for scholars of South Asia across several teaching departments within Emory especially, the Department of Middle Eastern and South Asian Studies and the Department of Religion which programmatically include the study of South Asian religions and history in their current curriculum. To classes that explore Hinduism or South Asia, the MCCM bronze offers tools to learn about religious festivals, Hindu

[226] See appendix III for Introductory Panel Text

[227] Michael C. Carlos Museum Label for Dancing Balakrishna: Balakrishna, child Krishna, dances gracefully, his leg raised in diagonal balance with his outstretched arm. His right hand is raised in the position of abhaya mudra, a gesture that dispels fear. He wears a royal headdress and a wheel-shaped hair ornament on the back of his head. He is auspiciously adorned with shoulder ornaments, toe and finger rings, and anklets. The tiny marking on his right chest is the chrivatsa indicating the eternal abode of the goddess lakshmi, consort of Vishnu – of whom Krishna is one form.

The sculpture is an example of the bronzes of the Chola Dynasty of South India that are known for their attention to the human form and portrayal of dynamic bodily movement. The round holes in the base of the sculpture allowed it to be attached to a palanquin or cart during temple processions. In such ritual contexts, the image would be dressed in silks, ornaments, and flowers.

[228] Michael Baxandall, "Exhibiting Intention: Some Preconditions of the Visual Display of Culturally Purposeful Objects," in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display,* eds. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, (Washington & London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 38.

temples, Chola period patronage, bronze making techniques, and Indian history. Moreover, the MCCM bronze has a special art historical significance. As discussed in Chapter 2, the process through which Indian sculpture became valued as art in the Euro-American art world favored certain types of images. Art from the Chola Empire received favorable treatment and thus carries an art historical emphasis when universities teach about Indian art. This art historical value encompasses its aesthetic value which is best exhibited by the design choice to have 360 degrees of this statue visible.

When Robert Walzer proposed the MCCM bronze for donation to the museum, it had to meet rigorous acquisition policies. In this context, the advertised provenance value of the bronze through its association with the Belmont Collection, the *Indische Kunst* exhibition, and its purchase from Sotheby's, was a signal to the museum that this was a legitimate and licit object to acquire. Such provenance would have bolstered the bronze's value because at the time of its acquisition to the Carlos Museum, it was not known that the MCCM bronze was not in fact part of the 1966 *Indische Kunst* exhibition, nor was the trail of evidence linking it to the Belmont collection broken. These associations attributed cultural value and social capital to the bronze. The institution of the Carlos Museum then became the repository of this social capital and cultural significance when it acquired this bronze. Chola bronzes are a staple of Euro-American museums: no South Asian museum collection is complete without one. Gaining a Chola bronze adds to the prestige and scope of the collection.

The Carlos, and museums in general, prefer not to disclose monetary value of their works. One reason for this is security: advertising the monetary potential of its holdings could invite predatory attention from potential thieves. Another reason may be detected through the notion that museum objects are often what Arjun Appadurai would call enclaved commodities.

This means that their owner, in this case the Carlos Museum, has removed them from ordinary circulation and has placed them in a special state with a very low potential for direct exchangeability; de-emphasizing monetary value promotes the sense that the object is not being considered for sale. But the monetary value of the MCCM bronze still lurks under the surface and is important to the Carlos Museum. Having objects with high market prices adds to the social capital of the museum – as does having donors who choose to supply the museum with such objects. Having dedicated donors, such as those who donate Chola bronzes, speaks favorably about the Carlos Museum.

While entering a University museum's collection emphasizes educational value, the Carlos was also the first known public display of the MCCM bronze, and so its exhibition value became more important as well. Stephen Greenblatt posits that there are two feelings that a museum object can convey to move the viewer: resonance and/or wonder.[229] Resonance is the ability of the object to "reach out beyond its formal boundaries to a larger world", and wonder is an object's capacity to "stop the viewer in his or her tracks, to convey an arresting sense of uniqueness, to evoke an exalted attention".[230] The MCCM bronze is an object of resonance and wonder. Its positioning in the center of the gallery, facing the viewer as they enter, draws them in. It invites the viewer to circle the object, read the label, and think about its life outside of and before the museum. The bronze's ability to interact with the viewer in this way is its value in resonance. Its wonder is highlighted through its 360 degree display and the opportunity it provides to admire the details. Viewers are struck with wonder at the dynamic form of Balakrishna and his delicate adornments first sculpted out of wax then molded into bronze centuries ago.

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[229] Stephen Greenblatt, "Resonance and Wonder" in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display,* eds. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, (Washington & London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 42.
[230] Greenblatt, "Resonance and Wonder," 42.

Cultural Biography Part IV: Life as Museum Object

In 2000, the Carlos Museum accessioned the dancing Balakrishna Chola Bronze as a donation from Robert Walzer and the Nathan Rubin - Ida Ladd Family Foundation thus embarking the bronze upon its latest diversion: the museum. In this moment of the MCCM bronze's life, it has experienced many diversions from its original path. Because each diversion has added economic, cultural, and historical value to the MCCM bronze, its inclusion in the collection of the Carlos Museum is its most valuable diversion to date.[231] In the museum context, the MCCM bronze remains a commodity, yet I argue that since it is not currently in a context of exchange, it fits the definition of an enclaved commodity.[232] Appadurai defines an enclaved commodity as a commodity that is shielded from the commodity context.[233] Meaning, the commodity, due to being in the museum context, has been taken out of circulation and exchange. When the Carlos Museum acquired the MCCM bronze, it did so with the intention of keeping it for perpetuity. The museum has not changed this stance, the bronze is not currently in a context where it is being considered for sale and in this way it is an ex-commodity. However being enclaved, or an ex-commodity is not a permanent state. The MCCM bronze retains the potential to leave the enclaved state in the future.

In its enclaved state, the intensity of the commodification of the MCCM bronze is lowered. In chapter three the exchangeability of the MCCM bronze was its primary attribute. The art market brought its commodification to an extreme and its exchange was imminent. At the Carlos museum, the MCCM bronze is not directly involved in exchanges but indirectly, a visitor buys a ticket to the museum, which then grants them access to the MCCM bronze. At no point is the bronze itself being exchanged but it is being mass consumed as it is viewed by the public,

[231] Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," 28.
[232] Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," 22.
[233] Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," 22.

which happens through the ticketing process of the museum. Through this indirect exchange, the bronze is providing economic value to the museum.

When the MCCM bronze entered Carlos Museum's collection, not only did it become enclaved, it also became singularized.[234] It is now the Carlos's Balakrishna Chola bronze, not simply one bronze among many. The process of being selected as suitable for the collection by the Carlos museum singularized the MCCM bronze. The museum was a new ritual environment for the MCCM bronze and it entered this ritual as a part of the set.[235] The MCCM bronze was first displayed as a part of the permanent collection in September, 2004.[236] Its installation in this manner remained until April 4, 2021 when it was taken off view in preparation for an upcoming exhibit and the Asian gallery remodel. Shortly after being uninstalled from the Asian gallery, it was reinstalled as a part of the *Avatars of Vishnu* exhibit on April 24, 2021. This exhibition and the MCCM bronze remained for three months, until July 18 2021 when it was again deinstalled. Just over a month later, the remodel and reinstallation of the Asian gallery was complete and the MCCM bronze went on view on August 28, 2021 in the context discussed previously in this chapter.[237]

As a part of the ritual of the museum the MCCM bronze was dressed for the part; set on a pedestal under a plex case. It had entered a space designed to enhance intentional looking. The performers of the ritual, the museum visitors, follow the preconceived steps of admiring the MCCM bronze. Circling the bronze, reading the label, but keeping quieter than usual. For the performers who the bronze evoked a particularly storing sense of resonance they may take a

[234] Kopytoff, "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process," 74.
[235] Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums*, 12.
[236] "Dancing Balakrishna," Michael C. Carlos Museum, accessed March 4, 2021, https://collections.carlos.emory.edu/objects/7126/dancing-balakrishna?ctx=195c2cb6d0669d36b09e5ec0220e06d41d2a28be&idx=0.
[237] "Dancing Balakrishna," Michael C. Carlos Museum, accessed March 4, 2021, https://collections.carlos.emory.edu/objects/7126/dancing-balakrishna?ctx=195c2cb6d0669d36b09e5ec0220e06d41d2a28be&idx=0.

photograph but turn off flash. Ideally, these actions lead to energizing stimulation for the performer. The display and interpretation are meant to emphasize the historical and religious aspects of the bronze thus the display is designed for the performer to leave with more exposure to Balakrishna, Hinduism, and Chola art.

In the Carlos Museum the MCCM bronze is presented as an "object of visual interest" that has religious origins and historical importance.[238] Its religiosity is emphasized for educational reasons though the religious rituals of lathering, adorning, and processing the bronze as Balakrishna cannot currently be completed. Simply because the MCCM bronze is no longer being lathered or processed does not mean the MCCM bronze has become a secular object. On the contrary, though the MCCM bronze is located in a non-religious environment, it is still a religious object that maintains the potential to be worshiped as a god.

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[238]Alpers, "The Museum as a way of Seeing," 25.

Conclusion

In his 2015 essay entitled "What Do Indian Images Really Want? A Biographical Approach," Richard Davis examines various paths and diversions of Indian images and in so doing asks: of all the life paths, which do the images want? The answer, he proposes, is not that Indian images want to live on one certain path, but that no matter the path Indian images are set upon, they want their stories told.[239] This thesis has told the story of one Indian image, the MCCM Balakrishna bronze, through a biographical approach focusing on how cultural contexts have shaped the value and meaning of the image through its life.

Biographies of Indian images, even Chola bronzes, exist in the literature, and indeed Richard Davis dedicated much of his professional career to the subject. However, he tends to use images that have clear, well documented histories dating back centuries. This thesis applied the biographical method to a Chola bronze with a less clear history, muddled associations, and many unanswered questions. Yet, four clear phases of life have been determined. And in each phase value and meaning are reconstructed by the bronze's cultural context. This thesis relies heavily on the concept of the commodity context and Appadurai's theory of paths and diversions for commodities. The MCCM bronze has shifted in and out of the commodity phase over its lifetime; and physical location, economic environment, and the intentions of individuals and institutions of the bronze have defined its value.

Chapter one employed what Davis calls, "imaginative reconstruction".[240] With the MCCM bronze, and often Indian images in general, much is unknown about their maker, patron, and other aspects of their early life in India. Thus "imaginative reconstruction" pieces together what is known about Chola history, Hindu temple traditions, South Indian bronze casting, and

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[239] Davis, "What do Indian Images Really Want? A Biographical Approach," 11.
[240] Davis, "What do Indian Images Really Want? A Biographical Approach," 25.

the religious figure of Balakrishna to give an idea about the religious context, uses, and value of the MCCM bronze in its assigned time and place of origin. This thesis comes at an exciting time with fresh research on Chola bronzes having recently emerged from subject expert Vidya Dehejia. Her 2021 book *The Thief Who Stole My Heart: Material Life of Sacred Bronzes from Chole India 822-1280* includes pioneering research into Tamil Nadu temple inscriptions from which this thesis has benefited greatly in reconstructing medieval temple life for the MCCM bronze and for exposing the uncertainty that remains. One such uncertainty is the date assigned to the MCCM bronze. The late 11th-13th century dates assigned by the Carlos Museum are dates of convenience which align with the dates of the later Chola empire, the dates which Sotheby's proposed, Euro-American ideals of Indian art, and the teaching mission of the Carlos Museum.

Though a speculative method, "imaginative reconstruction" still holds value for understanding the purpose of the bronze in its original context. For the MCCM bronze, this meant life as a portable dwelling for Balakrishna, housed in a temple but sometimes processed to fulfill his duty as a public figure. The MCCM bronze was also a conduit for social capital, elevating the status of the donor and the temple. It also provided opportunities for religious piety through lavishing the bronze. At some point, however, a series of events led the bronze to exit the temple context, where it was not a commodity, and it entered a context of exchangeability. This "imaginative reconstruction" gives background to the large shift in circumstances the MCCM bronze experienced in the following phases of its life.

In chapter two, the MCCM bronze is in a private collection, though likely not the Belmont collection, as previously believed. Although the trail of evidence connecting the MCCM bronze to the Belmont collection has been disrupted, the bronze still enjoys the monetary, cultural, and art historical advantages of being assigned to such a collection. From the

biography of Belmont and his collection, it becomes evident how easy it has been to mistake the bronze as a member of the Belmont collection. Alternatively, if this was a misassociation by design, the benefits for the architect of this deceit are also evident. While chapter two presents an ownership history that is confused, it is a part of the life story of the MCCM bronze and continues to influence the life of the bronze today.

Chapters two and three are a case study in likely mistaken provenance. The MCCM bronze lived at least twenty years of its life attached to the Belmont name before evidence of this association was discredited. But this incident highlights how central provenance can be for the trajectory of an object and the measure of its monetary, cultural, and art historical value. Additionally, this misunderstanding of the past of the MCCM bronze stands as one example of incomplete provenance, which is a common phenomenon in Indian images and museum objects in general. The probable misassociation with the Belmont collection becomes more relevant in chapter three, as the bronze enters its most highly commoditized moment on the art market. Ascription to the Belmont Collection and the *Indische Kunst* exhibition history directly increased the price estimate calculated by Sothebys in 2000. For Robert Walzer, the buyer of the MCCM bronze from auction, the statue was an object of social capital. Indeed, the bronze has been a source of social capital for individuals and institutions since its creation where it first served as an object to propel advancement of the patron and the temple, then for the anonymous collector from chapter two, next for Robert Walzer, and finally for the Carlos Museum. For Walzer, donating such a bronze to the Carlos Museum increased his reputation in the Museum world and allowed him to continue making donations to museums internationally.

Chapter four looks at the museum space and argues that it is a ritual setting, even if not a religious one in the same way as a Hindu temple is religious. In the temple, the MCCM bronze

was in a space primarily dedicated to human interaction with the gods. Divine interaction may be a result of museum visits for some viewers, but that is not the primary purpose of the space. The purpose of the museum is to encourage intensive looking.[241] This examination of the object underscores it as an "object of visual interest" while retaining its historic and religious context.[242] This context is especially important due to the Carlos Museum's teaching mission. In the museum, the ritual is not a religious one, yet the MCCM bronze is still a religious object, and the potential for a visitor to interact with the bronze as a god remains. Although the bronze has been long removed from its temple setting, placed in at least one private collection, sold on the art market, and now sitting on a pedestal in a university museum, it still maintains its religious nature. This religious nature however, is now just one quality of the MCCM bronze. In the Carlos Museum, the bronze has also exited the commodity context and has been enclaved by the museum's intentions to keep the bronze for perpetuity.

Throughout the life history of the MCCM bronze, labels have been associated with the image, and cultural contexts have shaped its life path. And even with the incomplete biography of the MCCM bronze, its cultural biography proves generative for uncovering the cultural contexts in which the bronze lived and how these constructed and reconstructed value and meaning in each phase. This cultural biography proves fruitful for fulfilling what Davis posits is the wish of Indian images: to have their stories told.

Personally, I hope the life of the MCCM bronze continues in greatness. Its value as an educational tool has been central to my undergraduate experience, and I hope future students may continue to learn from this object. This thesis comes full circle for me and future Emory students who enroll in "Depicting God in Hinduism," the class where I first crossed paths with

[241] Alpers, "The Museum as a way of Seeing," 25.
[242] Alpers, "The Museum as a way of Seeing," 25.

the MCCM bronze. One day, another iteration of the class will be taught at Emory. When that day comes, the students will have more context to understand the life of the statue.

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Appendix I: Douglas Barrett, Early Chola Bronzes, 1965, Plate 95.

Appendix II: Museums with Objects from the Nathan Rubin Ida Ladd Family Foundation

Ainu Robe, late 1800s to early 1900s, length: 50 in, 127.0000 cm; width: 55 in, 139.7000 cm, Denver, Denver Art Museum, https://www.denverartmuseum.org/en/object/2000.228.

Album Cover with Shiva as the Destroyer of the Three Cities of the Demons (Tripurantaka), circa 1875-1900, 14 7/8 x 13 x 4 in, Sandalwood; silver fittings, Los Angeles, LACMA, https://collections.lacma.org/node/209312.

Jina Rishabhanatha, 11th–12th century, Sandstone, 5 1/2 × 13 × 6 in, New Haven, Yale University Art Gallery, https://artgallery.yale.edu/collections/objects/181869.

Krishna and Balarama, 16th century, Brass, H x W x D: 36.2 x 15.8 x 11.6 cm, Washington D.C., National Museum of Asian Art, https://asia.si.edu/object/S2001.32/.

Long-stemmed Goblet, c. 2500 – 1700 BCE, black "eggshell" earthenware, Chapel Hill, Ackland Art Museum University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, https://ackland.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/1075/2020/02/G4-About-the-Art.pdf.

Maitreya, the Buddha of the Future, 1st-3rd century, Schist, h. 28 in. (71.1 cm); w. 12 in. (30.5 cm), San Antonio, San Antonio Museum of Art, https://sanantonio.emuseum.com/objects/6685/maitreya-the-buddha-of-the-future;jsessionid=20EF2F14714ABBCEA96C9201F5C1A43B?ctx=361e6419-6fd3-4e56-86eb-d416656541ec&idx=139.

Panel with Peacock Jataka, 9th-10th century, Schist, 7-3/4 x 24-3/4 x 5 in, Pasadena, Norton Simon Museum, https://www.nortonsimon.org/art/detail/P.1999.08.

Pair of Leonine Mythological Creatures, 206 BCE - 589 CE or later, nephrite, Worcester, Worcester Art Museum, https://www.worcesterart.org/exhibitions/past/leonine.html.

Shiva Linga, 19th century, brass, 17 × 11 1/8 × 9 7/8 in, New Haven, Yale University Art Gallery, https://artgallery.yale.edu/collections/objects/115865.

Vessel, ca. 1st century B.C.Ceramic, H. 7 1/4 in. (18.4 cm); Diam. of mouth 4 3/4 in. (12.1 cm), New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/64473.

Appendix III: The Art of South Asia Introductory Panel, Michael C. Carlos Museum

The South Asian collection represents living religious traditions that originated in India thousands of years ago and spread throughout Asia and around the globe – Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. The Philosophies and practices of these traditions developed in close interaction with each other as did their art, architecture, and iconography. The origins of Hinduism can be traced back to the Vedic traditions of the 2nd and 1st millennium BCE, while Buddhism and Jainism developed around the 5th century BCE. Over the ensuing millennia, practitioners of these religions developed myriad ways of imagining divine and human figures to venerate them and visually narrate their stories. This gallery includes statues, reliefs, and paints of deities and founding figures revered in the three traditions. Some of these objects would have graced temple walls or been part of larger monuments, some may have been used in domestic shrines; others belonged to royal or aristocratic collections. Different bodily gestures, ornamentation, draperies, and symbols communicate something about the nature of the figure depicted as well as the socio-cultural milieu of the historical period in which they were created.