

**MYTHOLOGICAL ARTIFACTS MADE OF CELESTIAL BODIES - A BUDDHIST DEITY OF METEORITIC IRON.**

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**Introduction:** Meteorites have been regarded as devotional and ritual objects by multitudinous cultures since prehistoric times. Artifacts made of meteoritic iron were found in old Egyptian king tombs and in Mesopotamian sanctuaries. In the Buddhist art in the Middle and Far East [e.g., 1], meteoritic iron used to be carved, but that tradition died out a long time ago, and only ancient artifacts are known. Figurative illustrations or religious sculptures of gods carved in meteorites are not reported in the literature. We here present a sculpture made of an iron meteorite that displays a unique particularity in religious art.

**The Sculpture:** Origin and age of the 'iron man' sculpture, carved from one piece of iron meteorite (now ~10.6 kg and about 24 x 13 x 10 cm), is still a matter of speculation. The Swastika on the cuirass of the statue is a minimum 3000 years old Indian sun symbol and is used as an allegory of fortune to date; the scale armor was originally gilded. The sculpture possibly portrays the Buddhist god Vaiśravaṇa (also called Jambhala or Namthöse in Tibet, or Hindu Kubera), and which can be either a God of fortune and wealthiness or a God of war [e.g., 2]. To our knowledge, the statue originates not from China, India, or Tibet. The provenance of the meteorite strongly points to the border region of eastern Siberia and Mongolia.

**The Meteorite:** A plate (~1 cm thick, ~500 g) was cut from the base of the statue. The texture of the metal is that of a Ni-rich ataxite with straight and curved schlieren bands visible at the etched surface. It fits in detail that of the Chinga (IRUNGR) meteorite. The metal consists of a very fine-grained intergrowth of kamacite and taenite (Ni 15.7 wt%, Co 0.5 wt%), which includes a few sulfide grains of varying size (<1–10 mm) consisting of daubreelite (FeCr<sub>2</sub>S<sub>4</sub>) and chromian troilite lamellae, and small (<1 mm) kamacite spindles (Ni 7 wt%, Co 0.7 wt%). A fissure contains brecciated metal, daubreelite and troilite embedded in rust.

A preliminary analysis revealed: Fe 83.5 wt%, Ni 15.9 wt%, and Co 0.6 wt% with Cr and platinum group elements (PGE) significantly enriched [3]. All data suggest that the 'meteorite man' is the third largest piece from the Chinga strewn field discovered in the boarder region of Siberia and Mongolia in 1912. One can speculate whether this specimen was discovered earlier as a single find.

Since March 2009, the sculpture is owned by an anonymous Austrian. Part of the cut socket plate is at the Naturhistorisches Museum, Vienna. Detailed studies are under way.

**References:** [1] Kotowiecki A. 2004. *Meteoritics & Planetary Science* 39:151-156. [2] Fisher E. J. 1997. *Art of Tibet* (Thames & Hudson), New York, 224 p. [3] Kramar U. et al. 2001. *Planetary and Space Science* 49:831-837. [4] Buchwald V. F. 1977. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society London A* 286:453-491.