

Bas-relief Sculptures of Unakoti in Tripura

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Fig. 1 Unakoti: Unakotisvara Figure (source: Sauradeep Nath)

If you are seeking adventure and heritage, why not visit Unakoti in the Unakoti district of Tripura? The site is renowned for its bas-relief sculptures of various deities, attracting many expatriates and locals every year. The name Unakoti literally means “one less than a crore.” The ASI protected site is accessible through roadways, and it is approximately 17 km. from Dharmanagar and 136 km. from Silchar.

The site was first noted in 1914 by Captain Williams, the then political agent to the Tripura princely state, and later a detailed report of its remains was published in the ASI’s annual report for 1921-1922.

The site's most prominent figure is the colossal Shiva head in the stream's bed. The figure, known as Unakotisvara, is 30 ft. tall, including the designed headdress, which is 10 ft. tall (fig. 1). On the rocks, right above the Shiva figure, there is a Durga figure on a lion.

Besides that, on the left bank of the stream, there are numerous rock-cut figures. One of these is Vishnu. A little lower down the valley, there is a group of Ganesha figures carved into perpendicular rock. Among these is a seated Ganesha figure of about 22 ft. (fig. 2).



Fig. 2 Unakoti: Group of Ganesha Figures (source: Sauradeep Nath)

Apart from the bas-relief, numerous sculptures, such as the Uma-Maheshwara and *yonipitha*, are also housed in the site. These were found during the site exploration in 1991-1992 by the Guwahati Circle of ASI.

The site remained as significant during the historical period as it is now. The *Rajmala* or Tripuri Chronicle mentioned that the Tripura Raja visited Unakoti a couple of times. At present, it is a major pilgrimage site for Shaivites, where an annual mela is held between January and February. Regarding the site's dating, there is ambiguity among scholars. Nevertheless, as per common consensus, it can be assigned to c. 8th-9th centuries CE.

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