

Carved relief of four dancing female divinities with spiked crowns at Angkor Wat

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Four dancing female divinities with spiked crowns appear together on a carved stone bas-relief at Angkor Wat. These dancing female divinities (each called an *apsaras*) are said to be created for the entertainment of the Hindu gods. They often are recognizable from their filmy skirts and spiked crowns, although the number of spikes in the crowns may vary. Angkor Wat is known for hundreds of images of these divine nymphs who usually are posed alone, but sometimes together in groups. The dancing nymphs' feet always are positioned sideways with toes bent back, and their hair hangs in a few braids below their crowns. They wear wrapped skirts and jewelry, but no top garments, which was customary for both women and men in many areas of tropical Southeast Asia prior to European contact.

According to Hindu scriptures, these dancing divinities, whose name means "moving in water" in Sanskrit, were the first beings to emerge from the Churning of the Sea of Milk in the Hindu myth of creation.



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