

8 BUDDHISM IN CHAMPA

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The earliest Buddhist inscriptions and images in South-East Asia date back to the 5th century. The first testimonies of Buddhist practices in Champa can be found in Chinese sources identified between the 5th and the 7th century. Many Buddhist monks were travelling in the region during that period; for instance Guṇavarman, an Indian guru who left India for China around 420 CE. The Indian tantric monk Puṇyodaya travelled in the second half of the seventh century. Moreover, there is the mention of the South Indian monk Bodhisena travelling to Japan, who met a Cham monk in 736 while travelling at sea. In the 7th century, Champa seems to have been an important centre for Buddhist studies; at the end of this century, the Chinese monk Yixing says Buddhism was known everywhere across the country. He wrote that Cham philosophy followed the *Ārya Sammitiya*, which belongs to the Theravāda (the *Sthāvira* or 'the Ancients' of Hīnāyana Buddhism). In the *Book of the Song Dynasty*, in the chapter on Lin-Yi (one former Cham kingdom), it reads that "an important and auspicious image of the Buddha" was kept and brought to China in 446 CE. In 605, the Chinese army destroyed a Cham capital in today's Hué region, and seized 1,350 Buddhist texts (collated in 564 volumes), but what types of texts they were remains unknown.

The question of the source of Cham Buddhism at this period remains open: either or both routes – the Maritime Silk Road, through Java, or the Continental Silk Road from China – may have been the ways for Buddhism to spread. But we do not have enough texts to know the precise sectary orientations of Buddhism, Theravāda or Mahāyāna, in Cham kingdoms. The first known texts in Champa are written in Sanskrit (no texts in Pali were ever found). Sanskrit was used by the *Sthāviravada* or 'School of the Ancients', flourishing in the 7th-8th centuries. But most probably, Mahāyāna Buddhism spread at the same time, introducing the Bodhisattvas 'Beings (who commit themselves to) the Awakening', and then the idea of the emptiness of everything.

The style of the earliest Buddha images found in the Cham territory testifies to cultural

relationships with South India or Sri Lanka, as well as with the Mōn kingdom of Dvāravatī in Central Thailand or with Gupta North India.

The first terracotta votive tablets known across the whole Cham territories, date back to the 7th century. The first samples, found in Kedah (Malay Peninsula), date back to the 4th century. The model for this type of tablet, representing a seated Buddha between two *stupas*, seems to come from the Malay Peninsula, and is found in Central Thailand, Myanmar as well as Java. Some of the Cham tablets bear Sanskrit *mantras*, such as the *ye dharmā*¹, whose recitation is a Buddhist act of faith. The great Indian *stupas*, which have sheltered Buddha's relics, are represented in miniature as votive images or meditation tablets.

There are different evolutions of Buddhism. The denominations *Mantrayāna*, or 'path of the *Mantras*,' and *Tantrayāna*, or 'path of the *Tantras*,' are not separate but are terms used to describe *Mahāyāna* practices before the 7th century, including the *yogacāra* school ('school of the followers of yoga', which uses *mantras* as a means for Tantric meditation) and the *Mādhyamaka* ('the middle way'). This is another Buddhism that appeared in the 7th century: the Tantric Vajrayāna. The term Vajrayāna is used for the Tantric evolution of *Mahāyāna* Buddhism. In Champa, the first bronzes of the *bodhisattva* of the compassion, Avalokiteśvara, appeared in the same period. It reveals a new stage in the development of Cham Buddhism development. Influences from India as well as Java seem to have integrated to give birth to a distinct Cham art.

In the 8th century, Vajrayāna spread across East and Southeast Asia, and Indian monks such as Śubhakarasiṅha (637-735), Vajrabodhi (671-741) and Amoghavajra (705-774) travelled from India to China. They must have made stopovers in Champa, because the navigation of this period made it impossible to sail without them. They developed the 'school of the *Mantras*,' called *Zhenyan* in China. The situation changed again a century later, when all forms of Buddhism were prohibited in China in 845 CE.

From then onwards, Avalokiteśvara was to remain dominant in the local form of Buddhism.