

17. Altar pedestal of Māra or Rāvaṇānugraha

Đồng Dương, Quảng Nam

9th-10th centuries

Sandstone: H. 84cm;

W. 95 cm; D. 75 cm

BTC 179-22.25a3



This mini-pedestal was recovered during the French archaeological excavations of the early 20th century in the *vihāra* enclosure of the Buddhist temple and monastery complex at Đồng Dương. Stylistically, it resembles other remains from the Đồng Dương complex, datable to the late-ninth/early-tenth century. It portrays a kneeling figure with multiple heads and arms, supporting or lifting a structure above him. His identity raises several complex issues.¹

Representations of kneeling figures are carved on other Cham pedestals and perhaps the best-known among these are the ‘dancers with scarves’ on the late seventh/early eighth century Mỹ Sơn E1 pedestal (Fig. 1).

This figure however has multiple heads and arms that fan out, and is the representation of a single person rather than a group. The posture and attitude of the crouching figure reveals strain

on account of the load he bears, while the Mỹ Sơn E1 pedestal figures are energetic but relaxed and graceful even as their hands support the stair above.

The Đồng Dương figure is enigmatic but there is a reminiscence of the well-known epic and purāṇic narrative of Rāvaṇa lifting Mount Kailāsa (*Rāvaṇānugrahamūrti*), which was clearly represented in Champa, especially on the Mỹ Sơn F1 tympanum (Fig. 2).

The close juxtaposition of faces in profile and the fan-like arrangement of multiple arms are so akin to the *Rāvaṇānugraha* iconographic type² on the F1 tympanum that it is tempting to identify the being depicted on this mini-pedestal as Rāvaṇa. The peculiar arrangement of arms and heads on the Đồng Dương piece could be seen as depicting four individuals rather than one, but although the carving of the rear leg is a

1 For a more detailed and contextual treatment of the *Rāvaṇānugraha* motif in India and Champa, see Dhar (2018, forthcoming). For locating its presence in the specific milieu of Đồng Dương, see Dhar (2014).

2 The caption for this piece as displayed in the Đà Nẵng Museum during my visit in 2010, labelled it as ‘Māra?’.