

On 10th August 1978, three villagers living in Binh Định commune, Thăng Bình district, Quảng Nam province beside the neglected ruins of the Đồng Dương Buddhist Monastery, chanced upon this large bronze while they were digging for bricks.¹ The statue was reportedly buried 1.50m deep and 100m southwest of the sanctuary wall, lying face up under layers of sand, brick and pebbles. Standing 1.15m, this masterpiece is the largest bronze cast by the ancient Chams and features a female deity with a powerful, stern face with delicately inlaid penetrating eyes, full uncovered breasts, high braided hair and hands thrust forward. At the time of discovery, the two attributes which include a small lotus and a conch shell in the right and left hands respectively were broken off by the villagers who thought they were gold.²

Stylistically, the statue exhibits distinctive elements of the Đồng Dương period fused with Indian traditions. The ample breasts, commonly portrayed throughout the long history of Cham sculpture also has some indebtedness to Indian goddesses. Chinese Buddhist art seldom depicts female deities with a sensuous naked torso, yet this feature is prevalent in northern India, particularly in images of Tārā since the emergence of Tantric Buddhism.³ In the treatment of the garment detail, the Cham artist may have had intuitions from the Buddhist art of distant Sri Lanka and Mathura. Noteworthy are the two overlapping skirts around her waist. The way the meticulous pleats of the outer layer enwrap her hips and buttocks somehow reminds us of the finely carved folds of the upper garment depicted on sculptures of Sinhalese Buddhas. The sculpture expresses a strong artistic originality, which can also be seen in the statue of Tārā [14.3 BTC 188] found in Đại Hữu. As major representatives of the Đồng Dương art style, both display a square face with a narrow chin, flaring nostrils, connected eyebrows, an incised third eye, and a small forehead bordered by two pointed hair tufts.⁴ Her hair is plaited into small locks running down to the nape of her neck, while the topknot is held up by two horizontal tresses, forming a hairdo known as *jatāmukuta*. Set in the hair is an icon of Buddha Amitābha of the western quadrant of the universe, seated in the *dhyana mudrā* of meditation. Her frontal stance together with long arms and curving beauty lines under full breasts are also typical of female imagery in Cham art.⁵ These striking

indigenous elements allow us to eliminate the possibility that this masterpiece was an import. Yet we still need further research on metallurgy and the casting techniques of ancient Champa in order to confirm this.

For years, the identity of the goddess has sparked scholarly debate. Drawing on iconographic features, it is possible to identify the statue as Tārā, the Buddhist symbol of primordial female energy. This assumption was first proposed by the French art historian Jean Boisselier and later embraced by other scholars. Since Boisselier did not know the whereabouts of the attributes of the Đồng Dương female deity, he surmised that the goddess might have performed a double gesture⁶ with her right hand while holding a lotus bud in her left. Both the gesture and attribute conform to the iconographic formula of Tārā mentioned in the *Khasarpaṇa sādhanā*. In addition, this textual source describes Tārā as having the third eye on the forehead, the straight look and holes in the ears for ornaments. Iconographic study thus opens a possibility that the Đồng Dương bronze might represent a specific form of Tārā, tentatively the Green Tārā.⁷ Chutiwongs, however, said that the name 'Tārā' is never mentioned in Cham or Khmer inscriptions whereas Prajñāpāramitā appears often in Cambodia. She concluded that the Đồng Dương female deity might represent Prajñāpāramitā, the Goddess of Wisdom and Mother of all Buddhas.⁸

Vietnamese scholars have long assumed that the deity stands as a manifestation of Lakṣmīndra-Lokeśvara, the main cult image of the Đồng Dương monastery, when correlating this Buddhist icon to the foundation inscription C.66 found at the site of Đồng Dương.⁹ The inscription makes mention of Lakṣmīndra-Lokeśvara as the patron of the Cham king Indravarman II who ordered the construction of the Đồng Dương complex, and repeatedly describes the name of Lokeśvara (or Lokeśa) as the savior of human beings and the beneficiary of all the worship at Đồng Dương.¹⁰ Lokeśvara is another nomenclature of Avalokiteśvara which was popularly used in Khmer and Champa Buddhist art. Given this epigraphical context, Lakṣmīndra-Lokeśvara could be interpreted as the divine amalgamation of the king's name with that of Lokeśvara whose image was enshrined on the main pedestal [22.24].¹¹ Yet the core question remains

- 1 Trian Nguyen, 'Lakṣmīndralokeśvara, Main Deity of the Đồng Dương Monastery: A Masterpiece of Cham Art and a New Interpretation', *Artibus Asiae* Vol. 65, No. 1 (2005): 5-6; Kỳ Phương Trân, 'Tượng Bồ Tát mới phát hiện tại Đồng Dương', [New statue of Avalokiteśvara found in Đồng Dương] *Khảo cổ học* No. 2 (1979), 61.
- 2 The attributes are now in the custody of the People's Committee of Binh Định Commune.
- 3 Louise Frédéric, *Buddhism: Flammarion Iconographic Guides* (Paris: Flammarion, 1995), 180.
- 4 See Emmanuel Guillon, *Cham Art: Treasures from the Da Nang Museum, Vietnam* (Bangkok: River Books, 2001), 25.
- 5 Guillon, 103-104.
- 6 This gesture combines that of argumentation (*vitarka mudrā*) with holding an attribute, perhaps a lotus stem, in the hand (*pāṇi*).
- 7 Jean Boisselier, 'Un bronze de Tārā du Musée de Đà-Nẵng et son importance pour l'histoire de l'art du Champa', *Bulletin de l'Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient* No. 73 (1984), 334-336.
- 8 Pierre Baptise and Thierry Zephir, *La sculpture du Champa: Trésors d'art du Vietnam Ve-XVe siècles* (Paris: Réunion Des Musées Nationaux, 2005), 86, 210-211.
- 9 Trân Kỳ Phương first published his interpretation on the identity of this deity in 1979. In the following years, Ngô Văn Doanh and Trian Nguyen did further research and both supported Trân's argument that the deity represents Lakṣmīndra-Lokeśvara.
- 10 Ramesh Chandra Majumdar, *Ancient Indian Colonies in the Far East, Vol I. Champa, Book III, The Inscriptions of Champa* (Lahore: The Punjab Sanskrit Book Depot, 1927), 74-88; Karl-Heinz Golzio, *Inscriptions of Campa* (Germany: Shaker Verlag GmbH, 2004), 60-73.