

19. Bodhisattva

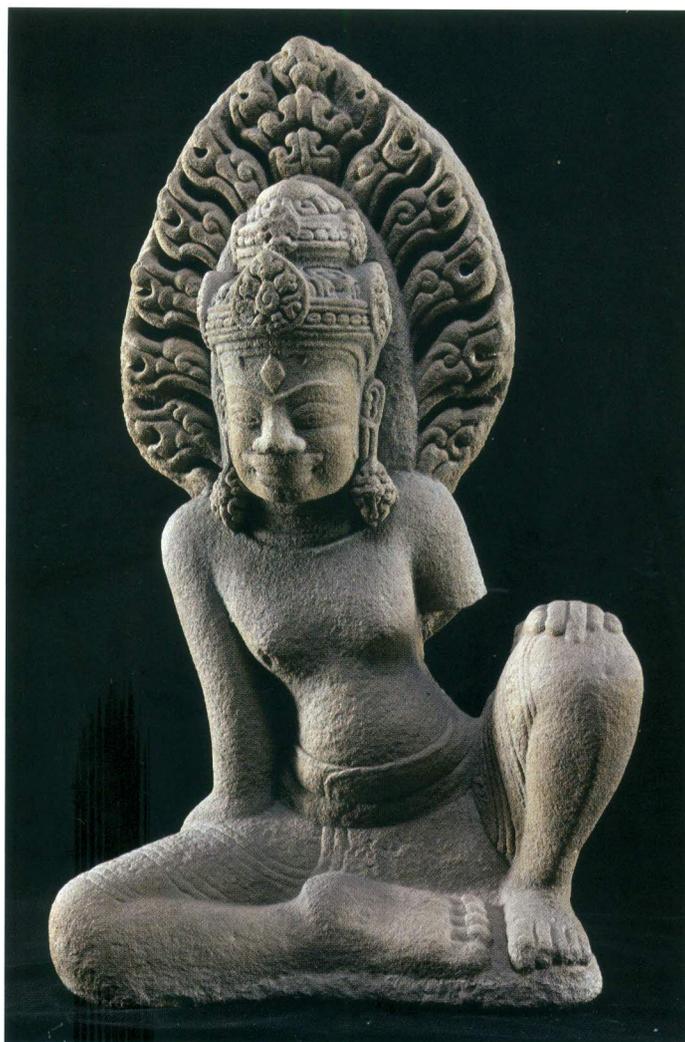
Đồng Dương, Quảng Nam

9th-10th centuries

Sandstone: H. 72 cm;

W. 44cm; D. 33 cm

BTC 186-3.6



- 1 The remains of the principal nimbus are today conserved in the Cham Museum in Đà Nẵng, where it is not on display. It appears it was not known to Jean Boisselier who makes no mention of it in his study on this work. See Boisselier 1963 (2).
- 2 See for example the assistant of a Bodhisattva in grotto no. 328 in *Zhongguo Meishu Quanji, Diaosubian*, vol. VII 'Dunhuang caisu', no. 123.



Fig. 1 Bodhisattva inclines, showing a vertical tenon behind the nimbus.

Of all the images grouped around the colossal Đồng Dương Buddha, two seated symmetrical statues with sumptuous, flaming aureoles are among the most refined. Seated in an elegant, languid pose, they lean on one knee with the sole of the right foot facing upwards. With the trace of a smile in the eyes and mouth, the figures place a delicate hand on their raised knee and support themselves behind with the other. One is now conserved in the Đà Nẵng Museum and his companion is in the Rietberg Museum, Zurich (acc. RHJ 403). The bust is erect yet fleshy and leans forward with suppleness with an ecstatic expression, conferring much humanity to a work of great quality.

The naked torso above a simple loin cloth contrasts with the heavy ear pendants resting on the shoulders, a high bejewelled diadem (*kirita*) and a richly ornamented hair cover (*mukuta*) mounting in layers. The nimbus seems to burst with a thousand flames of baroque foliage in a manner similar to that which formerly surrounded the head of the Buddha himself.¹

The extraordinary face exalts the canons of the period. The nose is strong and flat, the eyes are long and almond-shaped, the eyebrows are joined, thick and sinuous, the forehead lozenge is marked and the full lips are lined with a thick mustache. The sculpture was originally attached to a brick structure with a long vertical tenon behind the nimbus and the image could have been positioned in an elevated position in the hall, which may also explain the leaning forward. It is highly probable that we have here a representation of a Bodhisattva – possibly of a secondary, non-individualised rank – as may be suggested by the forehead mark (*ūrṇā?*), the treatment of the hair under the diadem and the particular position, a variant of the 'royal ease' (*rājalilāsana*). This posture, combined with the richness of the nimbus which echoes that of the Buddha, also ends us back to those images taking part in the Chinese world, in pairs, in the assemblies in the Buddhist grottoes of Dunhuang (Gansu), whether they be Bodhisattva or their assistants.²