

## 20. Mahākāśyapa (?)

Đồng Dương, Quảng Nam  
9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries  
Sandstone: H. 88 cm;  
W. 29 cm; D. 27 cm  
BTC 174-44.258



Dressed in a monastic robe of two parts, this small, unfortunately headless, monk wearing sandals played some part in the assembly of figures surrounding the great Buddha enthroned in the large pillared hall of Đồng Dương temple. Standing on an open lotus (*padmāsana*), his place was no doubt on one of the different levels arranged around the Buddha in a clever play of redentations at the back of the nave. His gesture of offering, at once reserved and withdrawn, projects a deeply moving sensitivity through the rough stone that captures his posture and hand gestures.

The monk, who perhaps represents the entire monastic community (*saṅgha*) was no doubt offering to the Buddha the large lotus flower held in his joined hands, fixing for eternity, a gesture that in itself constitutes an act of faith. The almost theatrical staging of these different sculptures, conceived in relation to each other, is distinctive of the Buddhist art of these excavated sanctuaries. But it was less the great models of Mahārāṣṭra, then remote in time and place, than the sanctuaries of south China – who inherited the Indic traditions via the Silk Route and the oases of Central Asia – that were the sources of inspiration for the sponsors of Đồng Dương. It is certain, in any case, that the posture, and above all the treatment of the robe, link this work to the Chinese tradition.

One would search in vain for a sculpture of this kind in the Buddhist monuments of Southeast Asia at this period, while it is only natural when one turns towards China, where, for centuries, the Bhikṣu ('Buddhist monk', 'mendicant') flanked the Buddha Śākyamuni, immediately at his side, among the Bhodhisattva.<sup>1</sup> At the same period, corresponding with the Tang dynasty (618-907 CE), he could be compared with some of the representations in the Binglinsi grottoes.<sup>2</sup>

It may perhaps be possible to identify the monk in the particular treatment of the neck, a detail noted earlier by Jean Boisselier. This could be Mahākāśyapa, a disciple of the Buddha Śākyamuni, who was known for his austere and emaciated traits that manifested the rigours of his observation of the discipline, in counterpoint to Ānanda, another disciple, who was impregnated with ecstatic softness.<sup>3</sup> This latter was not found in the excavations of 1902, unless a small monk's head with nimbus and ethereal smile may be attributed to him.<sup>4</sup> The identification is attractive because these two monks were intimately engaged in the diffusion of the doctrine after the extinction of the Buddha, and they would be a perfect fit for a *vihāra*, the meeting place of a monastery.

1 Siren 1925, pl. 264; pl. 299. The monk in pl. 470 also offers a large lotus flower.

2 *Zhongguo Meishu Quanji, Diasu bian*, vol IX, 'Binglinsi dengshiku diaosu', pl. 127.

3 Jacques Giès et Monique Cohen (dir.), *Sérinde, Terre de Bouddha*, Réunion des Musées nationaux, Paris 1995, pp. 305-7.

4 Boisselier 1963 (1), fig. 48.