

guardian could be a short sword or a dagger (*kīla*) sharper than those of the other guardian divinities, while his companion on the right holds – like all *dvārapāla* on this side at Đờng Dương – a *vajra* (thunderbolt). The left hand of the left guardian is not sculpted well and is not clear. The head of a serpent from the sacred cord appears in this hand in a way hard to understand.

Assembled with tenon and mortice, the guardians trample on water buffaloes. The animal crushed under the left guardian, spits from its mouth a small person who despite his diminutive size fights ferociously with the *dvārapāla*. (Fig. 1) Dressed in a loin cloth with pendants and with an elaborate hairstyle, this enigmatic small person brandishes his sword while protecting himself with a shield held on the animal's head.

Although the virile and athletic (*vīra*) aspect of the guardians takes us back to their Indic *yakṣa* origins, their general demeanour, notably the movements of the arms, as Pierre Dupont was first to note, recall the Chinese assembly guardians (*lishi*). These *lishi*, often armed with *vajra* (*jingang lishi*), are found in the whole of the Chinese Buddhist world and particularly under the T'ang (618-907 CE), where they acquired this fierce aspect and dynamism. This T'ang imagery would eventually give rise to the very expressive examples of door-guardians (*kongō-rikishi*) of the Nara period (710-794 CE) and later. The *dvārapāla* of Đờng Dương appear therefore to have absorbed something from

the Chinese iconography, of which the most beautiful examples are in Dunhuang (Gansu) at Guangyun (Sichuan).

Trampling animals however is never encountered with *lishi*. But in the Buddhist assemblies from Central Asia to Japan, it is the Four great kings (*caturmahārāja*) or Guardians of the World (*lokapāla*) who are recognizable precisely because they trample monsters...

The *dvārapāla* of the third Đờng Dương enclosure are perched on a lion (south) and a *makara* (north), each one spitting out a leaping person. Similarly in the second enclosure they emerge from a buffalo (south as here) and a bear (north). But at the main door, which allows access to the most sacred enclosure of the temple, the *dvārapāla* do not fight. They dominate their adversary with their hand posed ostensibly on their hip. The adversary has no animal form, like the demon Mahiṣa after his combat with the Goddess, after having earlier taken on various animal forms like the demons of Đờng Dương.

Though these iconographies are not substantiated by any inscription, and although the presence of these particular animals cannot be found, as far as we know, in any Mahāyāna pantheon, these door guardians could be seen as terrifying but beneficent forces battling with passions, with whose aid the faithful purify themselves, while entering each succeeding enclosure, before they attain the sanctum sanctorum.

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Fig. 1 Small person emerges from the buffalo's mouths and threatens the guardian.