

### 35-41. Gods of the directions (*dikpāla*) Vāyu, Varuṇa, Agni, Yama (?), Indra, Kubera, Īśāna

Mỹ Sơn Group A,

Quảng Nam

10<sup>th</sup> Century

An Mỹ 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup>(?) centuries

Sandstone:

During clearing work at the group A monuments, Henri Parmentier and Charles Carpeaux uncovered a great number of sculptures that were often difficult to associate with the conserved structures. Among these was a group of small images very similar to each other, featuring a person seated with folded legs, one above the other, against a moulded back-slab and set on symmetrical cornices. They were found near tower A 1, the principal monument of the group – a massive, elegant construction in brick, surrounded by six small sanctuaries (towers A2 to A7) at its feet on the four corners of the terrace as well as to the north and south, which was sadly bombed during the American war. Very soon, Henri Parmentier realised that the small images were not unrelated to the sanctuaries being cleared: 'It seems probable that the series of small figures discovered near A 1, came from these small temples, a hypothesis confirmed by the presence of a series of small pagodas and statuettes in temple B and in the first enclosure of Đờng Dương.<sup>1</sup> A little later he adds: 'It seems there would not be too much temerity in wanting to see the divinities of the six small sanctuaries annexed to tower A 1 in the six small statues which were at various points at group A.<sup>2</sup>

The comparison he would go on to make with the divinities of the small temples of the first enclosure of Đờng Dương was equally judicious. Like these, the divinities of group A are sculpted integrally with their pedestal and without '...lustral basin. These sanctuaries are so small that a priest would not have space to make offerings<sup>3</sup>...It is true that the entrance door to these miniscule temples was no more than 30 cm wide. The presence of animals on the principal face of certain pedestals prompted Henri Parmentier to propose identifications of some of the images. Thus the divinity with a horse appeared to be a representation of Sūrya (the sun, drawn by a chariot and horses), the one with a goose (*hamsa*) could only be Brahmā. In Parmentier's drawing of the deity with horse a powerful, smiling face was still present. (Fig. 1)

In 1963, in his study consecrated to *La statuaire du Champa*, Jean Boisselier would add to this ensemble two images conserved in Hồ Chí Minh city, which escaped Henri Parmentier's survey but evidently belonged to this group.<sup>4</sup> These hypotheses would allow him to identify several guardians of space (*dikpāla*): Agni on the rhinoceros, Vāyu on the horse, Indra on the elephant and Nairṛta on the *yakṣa*. The divinity

on the *hamsa* was still identified as Brahmā. Jean Boisselier wondered about the role of these *deva*, whom he associated hypothetically with the *navagraha* and concluded: 'Are these associated with the great divinities, with planets, and the *dikpāla* as in the Khmer examples? The problem seems insoluble (...).<sup>5</sup>

The discovery in July 1989 of a pedestal for offerings (*balipīṭha*) on the site of Văn Trạch Hòa (Thừa Thiên – Huế), would bring new precision to these iconographies.<sup>6</sup> In fact, on the lower level of this very particular pedestal, linked by style to the art of Đờng Dương, appear all eight guardians of space (*aṣṭadikpāla*) which we may associate with most of the divinities of the small temples. We thus find on this pedestal (moving clockwise and starting from the east): Indra (holding the *vajra*) on the elephant (East); Agni on the rhinoceros (Southeast); Yama on the buffalo (South); Nairṛta on a *yakṣa* (Southwest); Varuṇa, holding the noose *pāśa*) on the *hamsa* (West); Vāyu (holding a standard *dhvaja*) on a horse (Northwest); Kubera, holding a lotus bud? without mount (North); and Īśāna (holding the trident *triśūla*) on the bull (Northeast).

Relying on this well-defined and coherent corpus, among the seven sculptures illustrated here, four *dikpāla* with certitude, a sixth with probability and the last two more hypothetically. Besides, in Group A, Henri Parmentier discovered a feminine divinity, lost today, with the same characteristics as the other images found in this group.<sup>7</sup> We must admit that she is hard to integrate with this coherent group, unless she is the consort of one of them.<sup>8</sup> Also, we do not know where the guardians of the East and West were placed, for whom no small temple appears to have been built: putting them on the central axis of the monument was perhaps uncomfortable. Their positioning was no doubt a compromise as one often sees in India, where the symbolic from time to time makes concessions to practical necessity.<sup>9</sup>

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1 Parmentier 1909 (1), p. 345, note 2.

2 *Idem*, p. 353.

3 *Idem*, p. 354.

4 Boisselier 1963 (1), p. 157-159.

5 *Idem*, p. 158-159.

6 The exact date of the discovery is not certain. This is how it appears in Sharma 1992, no. 152, p. 142. For a full study of this pedestal and its connections with the *dikpāla* of Mỹ Sơn; see Baptiste 2003 (2).

7 She is only known today from Charles Carpeaux' photography, taken on site in 1903. See MAFV 2005, photo 17.

8 Exceptionally the consorts of *dikpāla* may appear. See especially Anne-Marie Loth, *Védisme et hindouisme, Images du divin et des dieux*, Editions Chapitre Douze, Bruxelles-Paris, 2003, fig. 184, p. 206.

9 On this subject see: *idem*, p. 187.