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The iconography of Avalokiteśvara in Java

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Citation

Sundström, I. S. (2020, March 5). *The iconography of Avalokiteśvara in Java*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/86069>

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Issue Date: 2020-03-05

Chapter 2

The ascetic Avalokiteśvara: the earliest Avalokiteśvara in Java?

If one happens to fall into the dreadful ocean, the abode of Nāgas, marine monsters, and demons, he has but to think of Avalokiteśvara, and he shall never sink down in the king of waters.

(*Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra*, Chapter 24; ed. Kern 1884: 413)

2.1 Introduction

When we think of Javanese images of Avalokiteśvara, we usually picture the richly bejewelled statues of Candi Mendut or the myriad of Avalokiteśvara bronzes. However, I will begin by examining an Avalokiteśvara statuette of bronze devoid of any jewellery, except for a simple diadem around the head, and who also does not wear a *yajñopavīta* (Cat. no. 1). It was found in Java, but its exact find site is no longer known. It is now in the Musée national des arts asiatiques – Guimet (MnaaG) in Paris.

I consider this image related to a type of Avalokiteśvara without any jewellery or *yajñopavīta* that I call ‘ascetic’. I herein follow Marie-Thérèse de Mallmann, who used this term to describe Avalokiteśvara images in Maharashtra that are, as she noted, similar to an ascetic Brahmin, who do not wear any ornamentation and only have a simple hairdo or *jaṭāmukuta* (1948a: 146).³² The same term was used by Pia Brancaccio for Avalokiteśvaras lacking jewellery in the Aurangabad caves (2011: 142, 168). Osmund Bopearachchi also used the term ‘ascetic’ as well as ‘yogi’ to describe Sri Lankan Avalokiteśvaras without jewellery, but with a deer skin over the left shoulder (2014). Because of the sparseness of jewellery and the absence of a *yajñopavīta*, I consider the Javanese image (Cat. no. 1) also an ascetic representation of Avalokiteśvara.³³

It is my theory that this small, bronze, ascetic Avalokiteśvara represents one of Java’s earliest Avalokiteśvara images. After a description of the image, I will substantiate my theory through a comparison with similar images found in other parts of Southeast Asia, through a comparison with stone images that lack jewellery and a *yajñopavīta* in the

³² “Enfin, tous les Avalokitesvara que nous avons rencontrés dans l’art Gupta et post-Gupta du Maharashtra nous ont frappée par leur absence presque totale de parures, sauf à l’extrême fin du style, et par le port du simple jatamukuta sans ornement qui, nous l’avons dit, lui donnent l’aspect d’un ascète brahmanique” (de Mallmann 1948a: 146).

³³ The asceticism of Avalokiteśvara was initially linked with that of Brahmā as both figures would wear the same kind of dress and hairdo, as well as hold a lotus, water vessel or rosary (Waddell 1894: 57-59). Later, the same connection would be made with Śiva (Studholme 2002: 37-59).

Buddhist caves of Maharashtra, Western India, and by means of recent theories on the spread of early Hindu and Buddhist iconographic forms in Southeast Asia.

2.2 The Javanese ascetic Avalokiteśvara statuette: iconography and style

The Avalokiteśvara bronze from the Musée national des arts asiatiques - Guimet stands in a flexed pose with his left hip pushed slightly to the left, on a circular base. The figure wears only a simple diadem and no other jewellery and the *yajñopavīta* is missing as well. He wears a plain lower garment, tied with a simple ribbon at the hips. His *jaṭāmukuta* is concealed behind the seated Buddha at the top of his head, but braids of his ascetic hair (*jaṭā*) fall on both shoulders. Around his scalp is a simple tiara, possibly representing natural materials that an ascetic would use to bind up the hair. The figure has a broken right arm, but the left arm remains intact, holding a water vessel. The position of the broken right arm provides no indication as to its possible attribute or hand gesture. However, taking into account common iconography in the region as well as in India, a possible attribute would be a lotus, or the hand could have displayed a *mudrā* such as the *abhaya-mudrā* or the *varada-mudrā*.

This small Javanese bronze was discussed by Le Bonheur (1971). He believed it to be genuine and compared it stylistically with Avalokiteśvara bronze images found at Ak Yum in Cambodia and at Surat Thani in Thailand (Cat. nos 3 and 8, Le Bonheur 1971: 152). While this is the only metal, ascetic Avalokiteśvara known to originate from Java, it is not a lone image when the rest of Southeast Asia is considered (Maps 1 and 2).

2.3 Similar ascetic Avalokiteśvara images in other parts of Southeast Asia

In other parts of Insular Southeast Asia, we find a few more, similar, bronze ascetic Avalokiteśvaras (Cat. nos 2-11, Map 1). All of these images are standing forms; none of them wear any jewellery or a sacred thread, although some carry a simple tiara. Based on their style of clothing I have divided them into two groups.

Group 1: Statuettes of Avalokiteśvara without jewellery and with a plain lower garment (Cat. nos 1-3, Map 1)

Group 1 consists of three images, among which is the Javanese statuette. These wear a plain lower garment (Cat. nos 1-3). The other two statuettes in Group 1 were found in Sumatra and Cambodia.

Group 2: Statuettes of Avalokiteśvara without jewellery and with a lower garment with a herringbone pattern (Cat. nos 4-11, Map 2)

Group 2 is slightly larger. The images wear a different style of dress with the centre part of the lower garment pulled up and over the waist band, creating a herringbone pleat pattern (Cat. nos 4-11). These statuettes are from Sumatra, Peninsular Thailand and Northeast

Thailand. A number of these bronzes have been studied by Chutiwongs in 1984 and 2010 (Cat. nos 5-7) and Lunsingh Scheurleer and Klokke (1988: Pls 54 and 7, Cat. nos 4 and 15). However, up until now these ascetic Avalokiteśvaras have not been grouped together as a whole, and neither has their spread been mapped.

The majority of ascetic Avalokiteśvara images that have been found in Insular Southeast Asia are damaged in some manner. This makes it difficult to determine what type of hand gesture they may have displayed or which attributes they held. Most of these images have two arms, but one statuette has four arms (Cat. no. 10) with all its attributes still intact. These are a rosary in the upper right hand and a lotus in the lower right hand, along with a book in the upper left hand and a water vessel in the lower left hand. In three of the two-armed Avalokiteśvaras we can identify a water vessel in the left hand (Cat. nos 1, 3 and 11), an attribute often associated with ascetics. The hands of all the other images are now missing.

The original location of a few of these images suggests a seventh century date. Two of these statuettes were found in the neighbourhood of Palembang (Cat. nos 4 and 7). This area is believed to have been the heart of the Śrīvijaya polity, known from the writings of the Chinese Buddhist monk Yijing (Yijing 1896), as well as local, seventh century sources.³⁴ One image (Cat. no. 3) is documented as having come from Ak Yum, a pre-Angkorian site in Angkor, Cambodia, which would also suggest a seventh or early eighth century date (Higham 2004: 58, Woodward 2010: 91).

Stylistically, we can note various differences among the images, for instance in the facial features and in the *jaṭāmukuta*s. The image from Cambodia has a slightly shorter garment than the rest, and the Javanese and Sumatran statuettes have threads of hair lying on their shoulders, while others do not show this feature (Cat. nos 3-11). It may be concluded that these groups are not the result of one workshop, but products of various places. They show an early common Insular Southeast Asian interest in the ascetic form of Avalokiteśvara.

Related metal images

Several other bronze images are related to this group of ascetic Avalokiteśvaras. They have ascetic hair and either do not wear any jewellery, like the ascetic images, but do have a *yajñopavīta*, or are lightly adorned but do not have a *yajñopavīta*. The statuettes with a sacred thread have been found in Java, Sumatra, Kalimantan and Thailand. Their iconography varies, as this group includes both standing figures as described above (Cat. nos 14-29) and seated figures (Cat. nos 40-42). The standing figures have either two or four arms. In a few cases the arms have suffered some damage, but there are several four-armed statuettes in which we can determine the attributes and hand gestures (Cat. nos 15-18). There is a bit of variety, but the most common ones are the *varada-mudrā* for the lower right hand, the rosary for the upper right hand, the book for the upper left

³⁴ Srivijaya is also mentioned in later sources. However, I believe these bronze ascetic Avalokiteśvaras date to the seventh century CE, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

hand and a lotus in the lower left hand (Table 1-3). These figures also all wear a tiger skin around the hips. The three seated statuettes all have two arms and display the *varadamudrā* with the right hand, while the left hand holds a lotus in two of the statuettes.

The images that do not have a *yajñopavīta* but do carry a few pieces of jewellery (Cat. nos 30-34) include a statuette that is now in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA). It wears simple earrings and a necklace (Cat. no. 30). Another image is much larger and is now in the National Museum in Bangkok (Cat. no. 31). This figure, too, does not wear a *yajñopavīta*, but does have earrings. As in Groups 1 and 2, these statuettes, that are closely related, show various styles. For instance, a number of them carry a tower-shaped hairdo (*jaṭāmukūṭa*) with a flat top (Cat. nos 15-17, 19-21), while others show the more common bun-shaped *jaṭāmukūṭa* (Cat. no. 18). The majority of this large group of sparsely decorated, mostly standing statuettes are in *samapāda*, while thirteen stand with their hip jutting out to the side.³⁵

Among these are four silver statuettes (Cat. nos 15-18) that reveal a similarity in both style and iconography. They may have been produced in the same workshop³⁶ or foundry. One of these statuettes was found on Borobudur and is now in the collection of Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden (Cat. no. 15). The second image is part of the Sambas hoard from Kalimantan, now on display at the British Museum (Cat. no. 17). The stylistic similarities include the shape of the *jaṭāmukūṭa*, with hair locks hanging down on either shoulder, the tulip style of the lotus flower and the thinness of the Bodhisattva's arms. The other two silver statuettes do not share this strong similarity, but they could still have been produced at the same workshop.³⁷

Related stone images

Apart from these metal depictions showing an iconographic similarity with the ascetic Avalokiteśvara in Groups 1 and 2, there are also a few stone depictions that illustrate a similar connection to these statuettes (Cat. nos 35-39). These stone images show the Bodhisattva wearing either a sacred thread or an animal skin over his left shoulder. One stone statue, which is believed to originate from Phnom Da in the Angkor Borei district, Cambodia (Cat. no. 35), shares the lack of jewellery and the herringbone patterned lower garment.³⁸ The two Sumatran stone statues (Cat. nos 38-39) each have a tiger skin wrapped around the hips, in a different style from how it is depicted in bronze. Shuhaimi dated the Avalokiteśvara (Cat. no. 39), which he calls 'mitred', to the last quarter of the seventh century and the first half of the eighth century CE, based on both stylistic and

³⁵ Cat. nos 14, 16, 19-21, 24, 26-28, 30-34.

³⁶ The use of the term 'workshop' is for practical reasons, as the bronze statuettes were likely produced in a foundry that also made other objects. The idea of workshops will be discussed further in Chapters 6 and 9.

³⁷ Another statuette that could be attributed to this workshop is an eight-armed bronze from Central Java (Cat. no. 207).

³⁸ The statue is currently at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London (IS.22-1988).

iconographic comparisons with images from Bangka in Java and Sri Lanka (1976: 123).³⁹ Shuhaimi also considered the four-armed Avalokiteśvara from Sumatra dateable to the middle of the eighth century CE (1976: 123). While we do not have exact find sites for these five stone statues, they were in the vicinity of a populated area, rather than secluded caves suitable for ascetic living. Despite the similarities in iconography and the length of the lower garment, these statues show varying styles in how the body is formed, in facial features as well as in hair style.

These stone statues indicate that the iconography linked to ascetic Avalokiteśvaras was not limited to small metal statuettes that suggest a personal use, but may have been in use in a monastic or temple setting as well. The statue found 500 metres to the west of Telaga Batu in Sumatra (Cat. no. 39), was discovered near a wall that Shuhaimi theorised had been part of a larger structure that housed the statue (1978: 46-47).⁴⁰ It appears that this ascetic iconography remained important in later Khmer art (Chutiwongs 1984: Pls 126-127), whereas in Java a princely form of Avalokiteśvara became dominant, which did, however, retain some elements of the ascetic Avalokiteśvara, such as the water vessel, the tiger skin and the *jaṭāmukuta* (Cat. nos. 218, 236, 263 and 265).

2.4 Iconographic and stylistic comparison with images from India

As far as I am aware, no similar small and metal ascetic Avalokiteśvara images have been found in India. However, a comparable iconography can be found in stone reliefs in the Buddhist caves of Maharashtra at Ellora, Ajanta, Aurangabad and Bagh. These ascetic depictions occur primarily in three different iconographic situations: the first showing the Bodhisattva standing as an attendant to the seated Buddha with a second *bodhisattva*; the second showing him as the focus of a triad with two female attendants; and the third presenting him as Aṣṭamahābhaya Avalokiteśvara (“Saviour from Eight Great Perils”, also referred to as the Litany of Avalokiteśvara).⁴¹ De Mallmann included these three types of depictions in her monograph on Avalokiteśvara in India (1948a).

She noted that the clothing and *jaṭāmukuṭas* of Avalokiteśvara remained the same throughout the caves’ chronology, but the antelope skin over the left shoulder was a late addition to the cave iconography (1948a: 136). Part of creating the brahmanic iconography for Avalokiteśvara lay in the *jaṭāmukuṭa* design. While most of the *jaṭāmukuṭa* depictions lack a tiara, those who do carry this feature have minimal ornamentation (de Mallmann 1948a: 136).⁴²

³⁹ Shuhaimi uses the term ‘mitred’ to describe Avalokiteśvara’s hairdo for this particular statue. There is an Avalokiteśvara image from Sri Lanka that has a similar hairdo (Chutiwongs 1984: Pl. 22).

⁴⁰ Shuhaimi connects the statue found near Telaga Batu (Cat. no 39), to Avalokiteśvara statues found at Situlpavu monastery in Sri Lanka (1978: 52).

⁴¹ In the Maharashtra caves the ascetic form of Avalokiteśvara exists concurrently with the princely form of the Bodhisattva (Brancaccio 2011: 283).

⁴² “Le *jaṭāmukuta* (nous le désignerons désormais sous ce nom) est rarement ceint d’un diadème; lorsqu’il existe, celui-ci est peu ornementé; il contient habituellement une figurine de Buddha, assis à l’indienne, et donc le geste est variable; nous y reviendrons plus loin” (de Mallmann 1948a: 136).

An example of the attendant type can be found in Cave 8 at the Ellora cave complex, where we see Avalokiteśvara standing outside a cella in which the Buddha sits (Malandra 1993: fig. 99). The figure can be identified as Avalokiteśvara through the seated Buddha figure in his *jaṭāmukuta*. The Bodhisattva does not wear any jewellery or a *yajñopavīta*. He stands in *samapāda* and displays the *abhaya-mudrā* with his right hand and holds a lotus in his left hand. This is a quite common type of Avalokiteśvara depiction in the Buddhist cave complexes in western India. Other examples are found in Cave 10 at Ellora and Cave 26 at Ajanta, for instance (ArtStor Id. no. 3659 and 11382).

We see the second type of ascetic depiction, without jewellery or a *yajñopavīta*, when Avalokiteśvara sits in *bhadrāsana* and is flanked by two standing female figures (identified as Bhṛkuṭī and Tārā), as in Cave 4 at Ellora (Malandra 1993: 42). In this relief Avalokiteśvara displays the *abhaya-mudrā* with his right hand and holds a lotus in his left. Another example of Avalokiteśvara in the centre of such a triad can be seen in Cave 90 at Kanheri, where he stands in *samapāda* between Bhṛkuṭī and Tārā (Pl. 2A).

The third ascetic type of representation, without jewellery or a *yajñopavīta*, is the Aṣṭamahābhaya Avalokiteśvara, which is found at many of the cave complexes, including Ajanta, Ellora, Aurangabad and Kanheri (Pl. 2B). One of its earliest examples can be found in Cave 4 at Ajanta (Spink 2005 Vol. 5: 98). The work on Cave 4 is thought to have begun in 464 CE and after a hiatus it was resumed in 474 CE. Its Aṣṭamahābhaya Avalokiteśvara likely dates to the late fifth century CE (Spink 2005 Vol. 1: figs 63-66).

We find the Aṣṭamahābhaya Avalokiteśvara in various other caves at the different complexes, such as in Cave 7 at Aurangabad, dated to 525-575 CE (Brancaccio 2011: 160). There, a standing ascetic Avalokiteśvara is surrounded by eight different depictions of perils (Pl. 2B). The central Avalokiteśvara displays the *abhaya-mudrā* with his right hand and he holds a lotus in his left hand. The reliefs on either side of him show various dangers that the Bodhisattva can rescue his followers from. We find these dangers described in Chapter 24 of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra*, as mentioned in Chapter 1.

From the top right-hand side of Avalokiteśvara these perils are fire, outlaws, imprisonment and shipwrecks.

If one be thrown into a pit of fire, by a wicked enemy with the object of killing him, he has but to think of Avalokiteśvara, and the fire shall be quenched as if sprinkled with water...

Mighty spells, witchcraft, herbs, ghosts, and spectres, pernicious to life, revert thither whence they come, when one thinks of Avalokiteśvara (*Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra*, ed. Kern 1884: 413-414).

From the top on the left-hand side, the reliefs show that Avalokiteśvara can rescue his followers from lions, snakes, elephants and magic spells. These reliefs probably aimed to

broadly cover the dangers of daily life in Maharashtra, whether faced by sailors, merchants or pilgrims.

When comparing the ascetic Avalokiteśvara statuette from Java (Cat. no. 1) with the ascetic Avalokiteśvara images in the Buddhist caves in Maharashtra, we find a close similarity in dress. Both the Javanese statuette and the images in the Indian caves wear plain, unpatterned wraparound textiles, with a cloth pleat between the legs. The other dress style, the herringbone pleat pattern of Group 2, may be compared to the style with a herringbone pattern seen in images from the sixth century CE in western India for depictions of Śiva (Schastok 1985: Pls 1 and 5). However, as this type of dress is found in various parts of India, for instance South India (Lunsingh Scheurleer and Klokke 1988: 26), we cannot determine which visual source in India inspired the herringbone dress style of the ascetic Avalokiteśvara images found in Sumatra and Thailand. It is also possible that this type of dress representation developed separately in Southeast Asia.

In Section 2.2 of this chapter, I noted the break in the right arm of the Musée Guimet statuette (Cat. no. 1). For depictions of Avalokiteśvara in Insular Southeast Asia the *varada-mudrā* became a popular gesture. In those cases, the arm is depicted alongside the body and not extending out, lowering the risk of damage to the arm. Other statuettes within the group of ascetic Avalokiteśvaras have evidence of a similar type of damage, possibly caused by the lower arm being extended out from the body (Cat. nos 2, 4 and 8). Some of these still have part of the extended lower arm. This leads me to suspect that the Bodhisattva either held a lotus in this hand (as in Cat. no. 10) or displayed the *abhaya-mudrā*, mirroring the iconography seen for several of the ascetic Avalokiteśvara depictions in the Buddhist caves in India. One example can be seen in Cave 26 at Ajanta, which has been dated to the late fifth century CE (Malandra 1993: 51, Spink 2005 Vol. 3: 226). In the Cave 26 Aṣṭamahābhaya Avalokiteśvara relief, the ascetic Avalokiteśvara extends his right hand in the gesture of fearlessness, with a rosary, and in the left hand he holds the stem of a long lotus as well as a small water vessel.

In the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra*, there is evidence of the Aṣṭamahābhaya Avalokiteśvara using the *abhaya-mudrā* gesture in order to provide safety. In the translation Avalokiteśvara is described as taking the form of “Saha-world Abhayandada (i.e. Giver of Safety)”, in which the term ‘*abhaya*’ is included in the name (*Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra*, ed. Kern 1884: 412). If my theory that the Insular Southeast Asian ascetic Avalokiteśvaras displayed the *abhaya-mudrā* is proven to be incorrect, it is unlikely that they actually represent Aṣṭamahābhaya Avalokiteśvara. It should also be noted that there are no representations of Avalokiteśvara surrounded by the perils he can save a worshipper from in Insular Southeast Asia. If these statuettes did not display the *abhaya-mudrā*, then they likely represented a generic ascetic Avalokiteśvara, who cannot be directly connected to the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra*.

The repeated appearance of the ascetic Avalokiteśvara in the Buddhist cave complexes indicates his popularity. This popularity may reflect an attitude of anti-“institutional monasticism”, as discussed by Gregory Schopen in his article on the difference between

the supposed development of Mahāyāna Buddhism in India and actual evidence for this (2005: 15). Schopen identified a strong “radical asceticism”, expressed in early Mahāyāna texts (2005: 15), which was likely of some importance to those who commissioned the carvings in the early Buddhist caves. Although the texts that Schopen examines are dated as early as the third century CE⁴³ (2005: 15), it is not until the production of the Buddhist caves in Maharashtra that asceticism for *bodhisattvas* is evidenced in Buddhist art.⁴⁴

Unfortunately, we do not find textual evidence for this interest in asceticism in Insular Southeast Asia. However, we do have ascetic Avalokiteśvara images, as well as clay tablets illustrating two ascetic *bodhisattvas*, indicating that the ascetic ideal was appreciated to a certain degree in the area in a Buddhist context (Cat. nos 12-13). While there is a difference in the material used for these stone depictions in India, in comparison to the metal statuettes of Southeast Asia, it is interesting to note that the ascetic Avalokiteśvara was important both in the Buddhist caves of Maharashtra as well as in Insular Southeast Asia. However, the popularity of the ascetic iconography waned in both regions and it was replaced by a richly bejewelled, princely form of Avalokiteśvara. The same development did not take place in Mainland Southeast Asia, where there was a continued production of ascetic imagery in the following centuries, up to and including the late Angkor period.

The Aṣṭamahābhaya Avalokiteśvara form in the Buddhist caves shows the Bodhisattva displaying the *abhaya-mudrā*, warding off dangers. Yet, none of the Group 1 and 2 bronzes of the ascetic Avalokiteśvara from Insular Southeast Asia show him with this particular iconographic feature. It is possible, even likely, that this is due to the damage suffered by the majority of these statuettes. As noted above, the breaks in the right arms indicate that the hand was extended outwards, likely in *abhaya-mudrā* or possibly holding a lotus. These statuettes may have been a way of illustrating the powers of the Aṣṭamahābhaya Avalokiteśvara in bronze. Considering the connection between Aṣṭamahābhaya Avalokiteśvara and the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra*, it is possible that these statuettes were used in a protective capacity. However, as we have no statuettes with the *abhaya-mudrā* intact, this has to remain a hypothesis.

Since ascetic iconography is associated with the cave complexes in Maharashtra, we must consider if Southeast Asian imagery was connected to caves local to Insular Southeast Asia. Even though we do not have exact find sites for the various bronze images, it is clear from Maps 1 and 2 that the majority of the images were found in coastal areas and not in caves. Yet, many clay tablets depicting Avalokiteśvara have been found in caves in Perlis in northern Malaysia near the border with Thailand, Gua Berhala and Gua Kurong (Jacq-Hergoualc’h 2001: 332). We need better dating for the Southeast Asian images in order to determine whether there exists a link between the ‘radical asceticism’ in Maharashtra and the early ascetic Avalokiteśvaras in Southeast Asia.

⁴³ The *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* text was translated into Chinese in the third century CE.

⁴⁴ Inscriptions as part of donations do not explicitly mention Mahāyāna Buddhism until the fifth century CE in India (Schopen 2005: 11).

2.5 Recent theories and the dating of Groups 1 and 2

The similarity between these ascetic Avalokiteśvaras over a larger area, from Java to the upper Thai-Malay Peninsula, is important and suggests a cultural connection between these regions. Various scholars have voiced a theory as to why similar art objects and inscriptions have been found over a large area of Southeast Asia during an early period of ‘Indianization’.⁴⁵ Dalsheimer and Manguin, elaborating on the work of Dupont, mapped the find sites of similar images. They found that a group of ‘mitred’ Viṣṇus was actually found along the coast of the Thai-Malay Peninsula, on the island of Bangka to the east of the city of Palembang in South Sumatra, on the northern coast of West Java (Miksic and Goh 2017: fig. 4.7) as well as inland in the Mekong delta (Dalsheimer and Manguin 1998: 88). They spoke of a pan-Southeast Asian ‘family’ of images that were produced in various coastal locations in Southeast Asia, following an ancient Southeast Asian trading pattern (Dalsheimer and Manguin 1998: 110). The find places of these similar images suggest, so they argued, a pan-Southeast Asian cultural response to external Indian input. Pierre-Yves Manguin further developed this theory in 2008 and 2010, drawing in other ‘families’ of images as well.

Apart from the ‘mitred’ Viṣṇus, he called attention to the so-called ‘Amaravati’ Buddhas, the ‘mitred’ Avalokiteśvaras⁴⁶ and clay tablets depicting the Buddha seated between two standing ascetic *bodhisattvas*, who each hold a water vessel (Manguin 2010: 172-174; see also Cat. nos 12-13). All of these were found in places near the coast, following local trading patterns with prehistoric origins. Thus, the tablets have been found in lower Burma, Central Vietnam, Peninsular Thailand and the north coast of western Java.⁴⁷

Most of these objects are dated between the fifth and the seventh century, the earliest period of Indianization, when religious knowledge of Buddhism and Hinduism spread in Southeast Asia (Manguin 2008). Eventually this pan-regional cultural response to South Asian artistic language evolved into more local styles in the eighth century, such as the plethora of art produced in Central Java (Manguin 2010: 172).

Robert Brown proposed a related theory in 1994. In order to explain how a specific iconographic feature would spread to Southeast Asia, he hypothesised that “South Asian

⁴⁵ Dupont 1934, Le Bonheur 1971, De Casparis 1975, Dalsheimer and Manguin 1998.

⁴⁶ The term ‘mitred’ Avalokiteśvara was coined by Nik Hassan Shuhaimi (1978: 46), but was not used by Manguin to describe the Avalokiteśvara images found at Rạch Gia (Mekong Delta), Vat Kdei Ta Nguoy and Bukit Seguntang in Palembang (Manguin 2010: 174). No ‘mitred’ Avalokiteśvaras have been found in Java.

⁴⁷ Nicolas Revire drew my attention to a stone plaque found at Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka, which shows a similar iconography to that seen on the clay tablets mentioned. The Buddha sits in the centre and is flanked by two Bodhisattvas carrying fly-whisks. The Bodhisattva on the Buddha’s right is adorned with jewellery, while the one on the left is an ascetic carrying a water vessel in his left hand. Revire considers the stone relief to have been produced in western India and later to have been transported to Sri Lanka, where it was at some point inserted into the relic chamber of the Abhayagiri *stūpa*. The placement of the ascetic Bodhisattva is unusual, as he stands to the Buddha’s left, while in the Buddhist caves in Maharashtra we see him on the Buddha’s right side, which makes the identification of this Bodhisattva as Avalokiteśvara precarious. Nevertheless, it is an interesting image that requires further study (Personal correspondence, 12-07-2015).

influences” was “filtered through a rather confined number of centres in Southeast Asia, each with a well-developed means of transfer to other areas of Southeast Asia” (1994: 12). Brown utilised the example of the decorative motifs on the large stone wheels (*dharmacakras*) associated with the Dvāravatī culture. These motifs were not derived directly from South Asia, but had, in Brown’s opinion, been filtered through Cambodia in the mid-seventh century CE (1994: 13). In the case of the ascetic Avalokiteśvaras in Groups 1 and 2, these specific centres could have been areas where we have found more than one statuette, i.e. Palembang in Sumatra and Khu Bau in southern Thailand.

Many of the find spots of these Avalokiteśvara images (Maps 1 and 2, pp. 40-41) correspond to the sites where ‘mitred’ Viṣṇus and standing ‘Amaravati’ Buddhas have been found, such as the Bangka island of Sumatra and sites in West Java. Another group of ascetic, standing, four-armed Avalokiteśvara statues in stone was included by Chutiwongs in her 1984 thesis (Pls 111-115). These were found in Tra-Vinh province in southern Vietnam (Pls 111-112), at Prakhon Chai (Pls 113, 115) and Buriram (Pl. 114) in central Thailand. These statues could form the core of another group potentially belonging to the pan-Southeast Asian cultural response, even though not all of these images were found near the coast. Many have been dated or may be suggested to date from the seventh century and I propose that the Guimet statuette from Java of Avalokiteśvara, along with the group of ascetic Avalokiteśvara images from Sumatra and the Thai-Malay Peninsula, may be added to the category of early images that support the pan-regional theory of an early period of ‘Indianization’, along with Brown’s theory of cultural filtration through specific centres.

The time period in which these ascetic Avalokiteśvara images were produced in Insular Southeast Asia, including the Guimet statuette, may be determined by comparison with similar images found in the area.⁴⁸ These images include those found in Maharashtra, the clay tablets found throughout Insular Southeast Asia and larger stone images from Thailand and Sumatra.

A number of scholars have given possible dates for the clay tablets showing two *bodhisattvas* flanking the seated Buddha. G. Cœdès dated these types of tablets to the seventh and eighth centuries CE (1927: 7). He noted a connection between these tablets and Gupta period art, especially those found in the Buddhist cave temples (1927: 7-8). These images would also belong to Chirapravati’s second group of clay tablets, which are inspired by the art of the Central Plain in modern Thailand, as well as art in post-Gupta and Pāla styles (Chirapravati 1994: 194). She dated these tablets to the eighth century. However, she noted that Krairiksh dated the same type of tablets to the second half of the seventh century (Chirapravati 1994: 203, 210).⁴⁹ In a 2012 publication, Piriya Krairiksh specified that he dated these types of tablets from the mid-seventh century to the mid-

⁴⁸ The general dating for many of the ascetic images from Insular Southeast Asia would be the seventh to the eighth century CE, based on the work of various scholars (Nik Hassan Shuhaimi 1984: 304, Chutiwongs 1984: 257, Lunsingh Scheurleer and Klokke 1988: 106, Gosling 2004: 91).

⁴⁹ Unfortunately, P. Krairiksh’ text is in Thai, thus I have had to rely on Chirapravati’s interpretation (Krairiksh 1988: 83-116).

eighth century, i.e. 650-750 CE (2012: 83). Also, in a later publication (2000), Chirapravati once again reiterated the dating of the seventh to eighth century for the clay tablets in her second group (2000: 178). Yet, the specific tablets showing the Buddha seated in *bhadrāsana* are, according to her, dated to the eighth century due to the roll of fat under the Buddha's stomach (Chirapravati 2000: 178). Unfortunately, the quality of the surviving clay tablets makes it difficult to identify such a roll.

Similar clay tablets illustrating the Buddhist triad were found in a seventh century level, at Batujaya, as part of the first phase of the Blandongan Temple (Manguin 2010: 174). We do not have a fixed date for the temple, but C-14 dating shows that it was not constructed before 400 CE (Manguin and Indradjaya 2006: 249). These clay tablets were found during the first stage of excavation, which showed that the temple had been abandoned after a period of activity (Manguin and Indradjaya 2006: 249). The second stage of excavations showed that after this stage of abandonment, the temple was again used after approximately 800 CE (Manguin and Indradjaya 2006: 249). As these tablets are similar to those found in Thailand, Manguin and Indradjaya used them to further date the temple to the sixth-seventh centuries CE (2011: 116).

Once the Buddhist caves in Maharashtra had been abandoned, the ascetic form of Avalokiteśvara was no longer produced in India.⁵⁰ As was noted in Section 2.5, one of the earliest ascetic Avalokiteśvara depictions in India can be dated to the second half of the fifth century CE (Spink 2005 Vol. 5: 98). Some of the later ascetic Avalokiteśvaras can be found at the Ellora caves, where we find ascetic Avalokiteśvaras dated between 600 and 700 CE (Malandra 1993: 25). Thus, the ascetic Avalokiteśvara was only produced during a limited period of time (that of the Maharashtra caves) in India.⁵¹ Perhaps, it was during the time span of c. 450 – 700 CE that the ascetic imagery in India inspired the development of the ascetic Avalokiteśvara images in Insular Southeast Asia.

The ascetic Avalokiteśvara statuettes illustrate an important cultural connection between Insular Southeast Asia and Maharashtra. They also show that approximately in the seventh century CE, Avalokiteśvara worship in Java and other parts of Insular Southeast Asia included his ascetic form. It was at the end of the seventh century that the Chinese pilgrim Yijing visited Southeast Asia. According to Yijing's writings "Buddhism was chiefly what is called Hīnayāna, represented for the most part by the Mūlasarvāstivāda School. There were two other schools newly introduced, besides the Sāmmīya. A few Mahāyānists were in Malayu" (Yijing 1896: xli). Therefore, it is possible that there was some worship of *bodhisattvas* at the time, though still limited when compared to the succeeding centuries, when more *bodhisattva* images were produced in the region. It seems that the ascetic Avalokiteśvara images may have played an important part in the early propagation of

⁵⁰ A number of ascetic Avalokiteśvara images in stone, in which he wears a *yajñopavīta*, have been found in Sri Lanka, at Situlpavuva. Metal statuettes from Sri Lanka, with a sacred thread, but no jewellery, have been dated to the late Anurādhapura period, eighth century CE (von Schroeder 1990: Pl. 79).

⁵¹ According to de Mallmann it was in Maharashtra and neighbouring areas that the ascetic Avalokiteśvara form was produced between the sixth and the eighth centuries CE (1948a: 156).

Mahāyāna Buddhism in the region. If so, the Mahāyāna form of Buddhism in Insular Southeast Asia may have had early links with Maharashtra in India. This could have included the radical ascetic forms practised by minorities of monks in India that propagated returning to the forest (Schopen 2005: 16). Such connections early on in the development of Buddhist bronze art in Southeast Asia might explain the finding places of ascetic Avalokiteśvara images in coastal areas of Southeast Asia, where some of these monks passed by to spread their ideas.

I suggest that we see the next stage of development for ascetic Avalokiteśvara images when the sacred thread becomes a permanent part of the iconography in Insular Southeast Asia. According to de Mallmann it was towards the end of the Buddhist cave period in Maharashtra that Avalokiteśvara starts being depicted as wearing an animal skin over the left shoulder in the manner of a *yajñopavīta* (1948a: 136). The use of a sash as a *yajñopavīta* is seen at Aurangabad in Cave 7, where Aṣṭamahābhaya Avalokiteśvara is depicted as rescuing his followers from various perils (Pl. 2B). The large, central figure does not wear a *yajñopavīta*, but in the narrative depictions along the side he is depicted with the sacred thread (Brancaccio 2011: figs 71–75). Yet, the majority of the ascetic Avalokiteśvara images from the Buddhist caves in Maharashtra do not wear a sacred thread, either in the form of an animal skin or a thread. For instance, at the Ellora cave complex only nine Avalokiteśvara depictions, out of 118 images, show him wearing a sacred thread made from a deer hide (*ajina*; Gupte 1964: 72).

Regarding the images in the Buddhist caves, it is clear that there was some development over time in the use of the *yajñopavīta*. De Mallmann noted that, while it is used for a few Buddhist deities in the Maharashtra caves, it is not depicted on Avalokiteśvara in the late Ellora caves or at Aurangabad (1948a: 244, Brancaccio 2011: fig. 94). It is possible that the same type of iconographic development occurred in Southeast Asia. The statuettes depicted with a *yajñopavīta* from Insular Southeast Asia also display a variety in iconography and style, indicating a later production date (Table 1-3). Taking these factors together, the use of the *yajñopavīta* as a later iconographic detail and the variety in style and iconography it is possible that these statuettes were produced after the ascetic Avalokiteśvara images in Java that do not have a *yajñopavīta*.

2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that one image of the ascetic Avalokiteśvara is among the earliest Javanese depictions of the Bodhisattva. Similar depictions have been found at various sites in Insular Southeast Asia, such as in the Thai-Malay Peninsula and Sumatra. I have divided them into two stylistic groups. Both appear connected with the Buddhist caves of Maharashtra.

The manufacture of ascetic Avalokiteśvara images from Insular Southeast Asia, Groups 1 and 2, without *yajñopavīta* or jewellery, may well have been limited in time.⁵² I propose that this group of ascetic statuettes from Insular Southeast Asia belongs to the period when Southeast Asian material culture suggests a pan-regional cultural response to Indian input, as discussed by Mangin (2010), and was affected by the “restricted-centres-diffusion rule” as theorised by Brown (1994: 12). By comparing the bronzes to the timeline for the ascetic Avalokiteśvara image production in the Buddhist caves in western India, and by comparing them to other images that demonstrate a pan-regional cultural response to Indian input along with the clay tablets, we can approximately date these ascetic statuettes to the seventh century CE or maybe even earlier. Even though we do not have a find site of the Javanese Avalokiteśvara in his ascetic form, its date might suggest that it is from West Java, the only known centre of Buddhism in Java at the time.

Besides a relationship in form with the images in the caves of Maharashtra, there might also have been a relationship in function. In the caves there is a clear relationship with the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra* that describes the perils from which Avalokiteśvara can save his followers. The available find sites in Insular Southeast Asia, many in coastal areas, could suggest that the small bronze images fulfilled a similar role in protecting travellers. At this early period in the history of Buddhism in Java and given the presumed relationship with the caves in Maharashtra, we may speculate that these travellers were monks, maybe monks propagating radical asceticism. This propagation may have led to a select number of monks taking up ascetic living in caves, such as in Perlis in Malaysia.

While the ascetic form remained the most important iconographic form of Avalokiteśvara in other parts of Insular Southeast Asia, in Java the two or four-armed standing Avalokiteśvara gradually adopted increasingly rich jewellery and many other iconographic forms became adopted and created.

⁵² The earliest inscription found in Java mentioning Avalokiteśvara, as noted in Chapter 1, is dated to the Śaka year 704 viz., 782 CE. The role of Avalokiteśvara in this inscription was one of protection, indicating that his qualities would have been well known by that time in order for them to be included in an inscription. Therefore, Avalokiteśvara must have been known in Java well before 782 CE.





Map 2. Find sites for ascetic Avalokiteśvaras in Group 2, Chapter 2 with Catalogue numbers

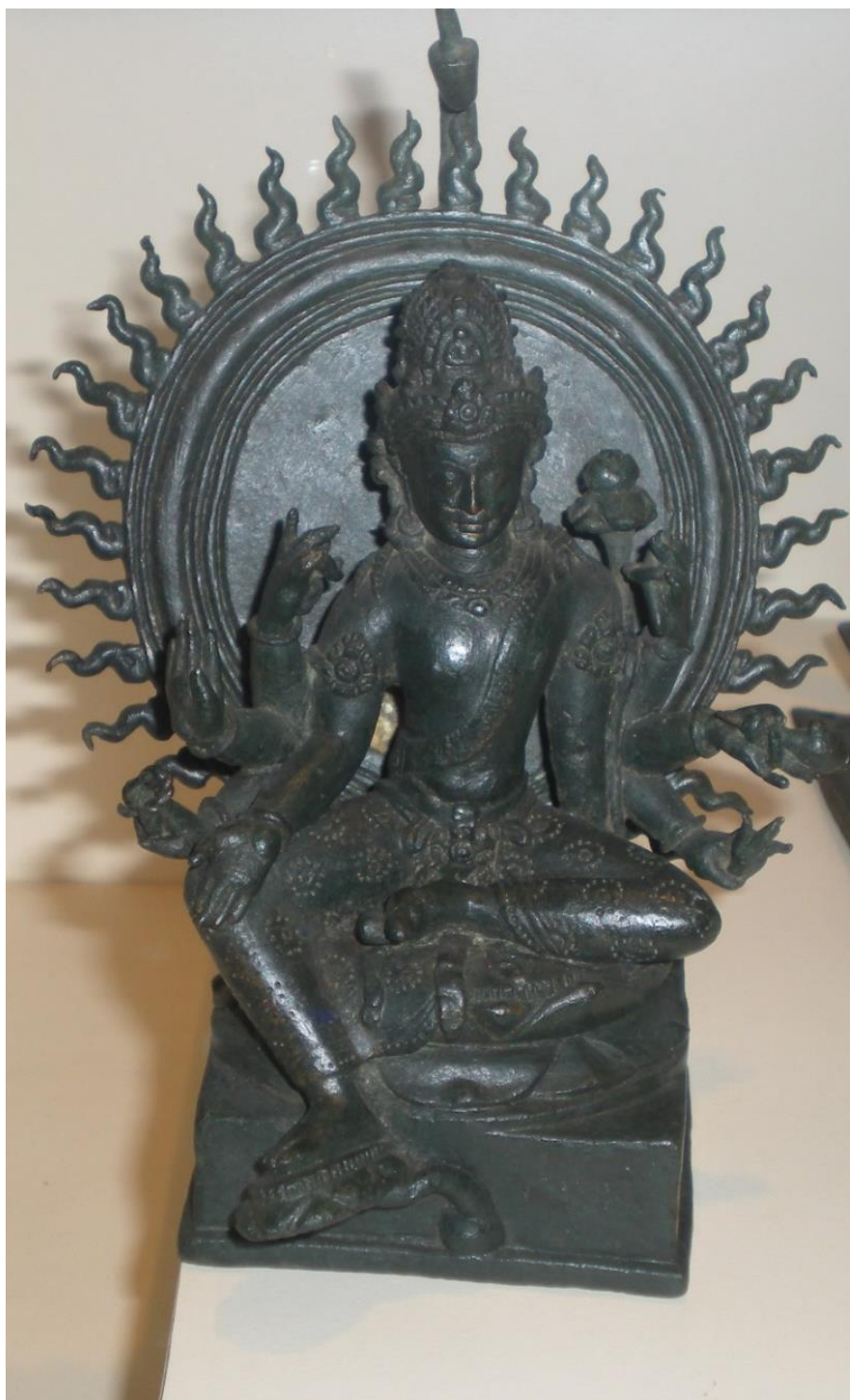


Plate 3. Avalokiteśvara seated in *lalitāsana*, Museum Nasional Indonesia Jakarta, Indonesia (Cat. no. 52).