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The iconography of Avalokiteśvara in Java

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Chapter 6

A unique group of *sattvaparyāṅkāśana* Avalokiteśvaras: evidence for a Central Javanese workshop

You know my method. It is founded upon the observation of trifles.

The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes (Conan Doyle 1991: 71)

6.1 Introduction

Quite a number of bronze images of Avalokiteśvara seated in *sattvaparyāṅkāśana* have been found in Java. In this pose, the right leg rests on top of the left without the two legs crossing. In fact, it is the most common pose for Avalokiteśvara in Javanese imagery (Cat. nos 132-180). Avalokiteśvara has either two or four arms when he is seated in this *āsana*, but the human-form is the most common. No bronze statuettes of the Bodhisattva with six or more arms have been found in this pose. Judging from their various styles, these images appear to have been produced both during the Central Javanese period and in the early East Javanese period.

The *sattvaparyāṅkāśana* pose does occur in India for Avalokiteśvara, but appears not to have been particularly popular, especially when compared to Java. One image of Avalokiteśvara seated in *sattvaparyāṅkāśana* was found at Acutrajpur in Odisha (Donaldson 2001: figs 224, 226). The *sattvaparyāṅkāśana* pose is also uncommon for Avalokiteśvara outside of Java in Southeast Asia.¹⁰⁴ However, the Buddha is often seen depicted in this seated form in Mainland Southeast Asia. In Sri Lanka, this *āsana* was also used for Buddha images in the Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa periods (Dabral 2000: Pl. xxxvi; Pal 2004: figs 1, 33, 44-45).

Yet, in Sri Lankan Buddhist art from the later Anuradhapura period (c. 300-1000 CE), we see Avalokiteśvara sitting in *lalitāsana* or *mahārājāḷāsana*, but not in *sattvaparyāṅkāśana*.¹⁰⁵ Other Buddhist figures, such as Tārā, are shown in *sattvaparyāṅkāśana*. These statues are dated from the seventh century to the tenth century CE. We know there was a cultural connection between Sri Lanka and Java, due to an inscription found at Ratu Boko near Yogyakarta. It is dated to 792-793 CE and refers to the construction of a Buddhist monastery named after the famous Abhayagiri Monastery in Sri Lanka, which had a strong Mahāyāna outlook.¹⁰⁶ Perhaps the *sattvaparyāṅkāśana* sitting pose became popular in Java through these contacts, but it does not explain why this pose was not used for Avalokiteśvara in Sri Lanka.

¹⁰⁴ An exception is a gold plaque showing Avalokiteśvara in *sattvaparyāṅkāśana* from Thailand (Pal 2004: fig. 86).

¹⁰⁵ For image examples see von Schroeder 1990: Pls 77A-77G and 78A-78E.

¹⁰⁶ De Casparis 1961: 241, Miksic 1993-94: 23-31, Degroot 2006: 63.

Within the collection of these Javanese statuettes, we find an exceptional group of eleven statuettes (Cat. nos 132-142) that share a great commonality in terms of both iconography and style. Unlike the statuettes discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, the cohesion within this group of *sattvaparyāṅkāśana* Avalokiteśvaras makes it difficult at times to tell the statuettes apart. The combination of the iconographic features, such as the seated position, the *varada-mudrā* hand gesture and the lotus attribute could indicate a specific manifestation of the Bodhisattva. As far as I am aware, this manifestation is not described in Indian Buddhist texts. As noted above, the style of this group of images in *sattvaparyāṅkāśana* is quite similar, as, for instance, can be seen in their back pieces (*prabhāmaṇḍala*).

6.2 Description of an example and discussion of variations within this unique group

The examples that I present here, have been attributed to Central Java. Unfortunately, there is little direct evidence that can tie them to a specific time or location. Nevertheless, key stylistic similarities among the images support the idea that they were produced during approximately the same time period and in the same geographical area. The individual statuettes are 11 in number and are currently spread out across the world. In examining these 11 bronze and silver images, three distinct features can be isolated for further study. These are the *prabhāmaṇḍala* or back piece, the Bodhisattva figure, and the base supporting the Bodhisattva.¹⁰⁷

The prabhāmaṇḍala

The *prabhāmaṇḍala* for these bronzes consists of a petal-shaped back piece decorated with a herringbone rim and s-shaped foliage. The rim often ends in leaf decorations at the bottom of the *prabhāmaṇḍala*, on either side of the Bodhisattva. At the top of the back piece is a three-pronged leaf and in several of the images discussed, a parasol extends out over the seated figure (Cat. nos 132, 136, 138, 140-142). In the case of the other statuettes in the group, there remains evidence of a parasol at the top of the back piece that is now missing.

The Bodhisattva image

In these statuettes, Avalokiteśvara can be identified through the Buddha Amitābha seen at the front of the *jaṭāmukuta*. The *jaṭāmukuta* has a bun shape with hair tresses falling down over the shoulders. The figure wears a tiara and jewellery such as a necklace, armbands and bracelets. A sacred thread crosses the torso, taking the form of a sash or a ribbon. At the left shoulder, we see a tie in the *yajñopavīta* creating a fold in the thread hanging down towards the chest. The figure has two arms with the right hand displaying the *varada-mudrā* and the left hand in front of the body holding a long stem of a lotus bud that comes up to the shoulder. The figure sits in *sattvaparyāṅkāśana*. The lower garment worn by the Bodhisattva figures in this group either have a circular dot pattern or no pattern at all.

¹⁰⁷ Unfortunately, I was unable to personally view all these statuettes, as a few are in private collections.

The base supporting the Bodhisattva

The figure sits on an oval, double lotus base, showing the details of the lotus pod above the petals. The base rests on what Nandana Chutiwongs has described as a ‘stepped base’, consisting of a base on a plinth (1990: 22).

Variations within this unique group

These are the main characteristics of this group of bronze images. Examining the individual statuettes, we will see that they share most, if not all, of these features. However, we can still discern a few differences and subdivide them into three groups for further examination. The first subgroup consists of four statuettes that are similar to the extent that it is even difficult to tell them apart (Cat. nos 132-135). In the second subgroup, the images show only minor differences (Cat. nos 136-138). The third subgroup holds images that show greater differences (Cat. nos 139-142), a few of which cast some doubt on their authenticity.

Upon close examination, it is evident that the first image of the first subgroup embodies all the characteristics mentioned above. The statuette (Cat. no. 132), currently at the Nelson Atkins Museum in Kansas City, has a height of 12.5 cm. The petal-shaped back piece, with a rim decorated in a herringbone pattern, has s-shaped foliage along the edges. At the top of the back piece are a three-crowned leaf and a simple parasol that extends out over the seated figure. The *yajñopavīta* takes the form of a sash crossing the body to the waist. Avalokiteśvara’s right hand rests by his right knee in *varada-mudrā*, while the left hand is held out in front of the body, holding the stem of a lotus budding at the left shoulder. Avalokiteśvara sits in *sattvaparyāṅkāśana* with the right leg resting on the left. His lower garment is decorated with a circular dot pattern. Avalokiteśvara sits on an oval double lotus, with the pod emerging from the petals. The lotus throne rests on a protruding top layer over a square base, which together with a bottom plinth, creates a ‘stepped base’.

Although there is a very close similarity between the four images in the first group (Cat. nos 132-135), they do not challenge the idea that these images were produced by the lost wax process. In this process, the sculptor creates a wax model that is then covered by clay to form a mould. Once the bronze has been cast, the clay mould needs to be broken in order to reach the statuette. The mould is thus lost and a new one needs to be made for the next image. Though a labour-intensive process, it allows for fine details in the bronze statuettes. Perhaps parts of the statuettes were created in reusable moulds, for example the back piece. However, closer examination of individual statuettes in this group show that the figure is fused to the back piece at two points and attached to the lotus seat as well, indicating that the statuette was created as a whole and not in separate parts.¹⁰⁸ Apparently, the workshops did indeed use the lost wax process. An example of a difference in the first and second statuettes is the number of leaves on the back piece. Cat. no. 132

¹⁰⁸ This may be why so many statuettes in this group are well preserved and still include the figure, back piece and pedestal.

has seven individual leaves on the left-hand side of the back piece, whereas Cat. no. 133 has six leaves. A second difference is the slight variations in height, although some of the difference can be explained by the remaining parasol or a slightly different base.

The statuettes in Leiden, Berlin and a presently unknown location (Cat. nos 136-138), form the second subgroup. They exhibit a majority of the stylistic details observed on the first four bronzes. The only differences are that they lack a protruding top layer on the base and an oval moulding below the lotus seat, seen in the first subgroup. These two minor differences and the overwhelming similarity of these first seven images suggest that they were made by the same artist, or at least at the same workshop.

The third subgroup contains the dyad statuette with Avalokiteśvara and a consort, giving us some further iconographic features to examine (Cat. no. 139).¹⁰⁹ Dyads are not a common way of depicting Avalokiteśvara. However, this dyad is included in this subgroup as the Avalokiteśvara bears a striking resemblance to the first seven statuettes discussed. Yet, no stone images of this type of dyad have survived in Java, and there is only one other statuette depicting this pair (Cat. no. 168).¹¹⁰ We do see a consort alongside a divinity in Hindu art, such as Pārvatī alongside Śiva (Lunsingh Scheurleer and Klokke 1988: 90, Fontein 1990: 208-209). The Avalokiteśvara dyad may have been an attempt at incorporating Śiva elements into the Bodhisattva's iconography, which is also seen in the use of the tiger skin in some images. In later Buddhist art, the combination of male and female energies through imagery became popular, but not for Avalokiteśvara in Java.

The bronze statuette from the Domela Nieuwenhuis collection (Cat. no. 141), also in this third subgroup, shows a base with elegantly shaped apertures, a feature not seen in any of the other bronzes examined in this study. Apertures on the bases are found in a few other Avalokiteśvara statuettes, including Cat. nos 95, 104-105, 110 and 168. I consider this stylistic feature to be one of the later features of Central Javanese bronzes, dating this statuette slightly after the previous nine statuettes were produced. The shape of the Bodhisattva's necklace is also distinct from that in the other images (Cat. nos 132 140, 142), as it does not lie in a half circle, but in a more rectangular shape.¹¹¹ The back piece has a more exaggerated petal shape. The lotus carried by the Bodhisattva is also slightly different in shape in comparison to the other images. The petals of the lotus seat do not resemble the petals of the oval, double lotus seats in the first six bronzes.

¹⁰⁹ Avalokiteśvara would most commonly be portrayed with his consort Tārā, but she would normally carry a lotus instead of a stalk of cereal. The consort accompanying Avalokiteśvara has also been depicted separately and can be found at Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden (Inv. no. RMV 1403-3007). This statuette shows a similar back piece and a stalk of grain. Fontein identified the consort as likely being Vasudhārā as she carries a stalk of cereal, although she is commonly the consort of Jambhala (1990: 198). Vasudhārā symbolises the same values as Lakṣmī does in Hinduism, such as fertility, abundance and prosperity (Liebert 1976: 149). This makes this Javanese dyad an interesting combination of figures as Avalokiteśvara is not associated with these specific values, but rather with compassion, although he can be prayed to if a family desires a child of a specific gender.

¹¹⁰ This dyad may be a forgery due to the difference in how the body is portrayed (Jones 1990: 301).

¹¹¹ This style of necklace is only seen on two other Avalokiteśvara bronzes from Java, now in Vienna and Oxford (Cat. nos 110 and 115).

The manner in which the left hand holds the lotus is also different from the statuettes described above. In this case, the left hand is held in front of the body, resting directly on the left leg at another angle. Yet, the foliage decorating the back piece appears to be similar to that decorating the other back pieces.

The statuette from Musée Guimet shows the most significant differences (Cat. no. 142). Lunsingh Scheurleer included it in a group of Central Javanese bronzes, which she defined on the basis of stylistic characteristics (Lunsingh Scheurleer and Klokke 1988: 29). Le Bonheur believed that this image was a forgery (1971: 150). He highlighted the larger *jaṭāmukuta*, the unusual appearance of the lotus (with a book on top of it), the dissimilar depiction of the lotus petals on the seat and the foliage along the back piece (Le Bonheur 1971: 150). All of his points are valid. Moreover, there is a lack of foliage decoration at the sides of the back piece such as we saw in the previous images. The flask the Bodhisattva holds is also an attribute not carried by the other bronzes of this group. The water vessel attribute is seen with eight-armed depictions of Avalokiteśvara from Insular Southeast Asia and among the ascetic Avalokiteśvara statuettes discussed in Chapter 2. The herringbone pattern on the back piece is also different, as it points downwards rather than upwards, as seen in the other statuettes with this type of back piece.

The differences observed in the statuettes in the private collection in Amsterdam and at the Musée Guimet may be due to a different time of manufacture or because they were made by another workshop (Cat. nos 140-141). The manner in which the back piece is designed, and the style of the necklace worn by the statuette in a private collection could be due to local variants in the production. The Musée Guimet's statuette's left hand is treated differently in comparison with the other nine statuettes. The unusual iconographic details, such as the bottle attribute, and various stylistic details, for instance that the rim lacks the central line seen on the back pieces of the bronze images described above, may also suggest another place of production. Or the image is indeed a more recent production, as Le Bonheur suggested (1971: 150). However, according to recent technical research, the percentages of copper and tin in the statuette are consistent with other statuettes from the Central Javanese period (Mechling et al. 2018:114). The statuette also has the expected levels of trace elements for the Central Javanese time period, but, more importantly, the statuette had a consecration deposit within it (Mechling et al. 2018: 87). Taking these results as a whole, I suggest the statuette was produced during the Central Javanese time period, but by a different workshop than the first nine statuettes within this group of eleven.

6.3 Other images from Java in *sattvaparyāṅkāśana*

This group of eleven statuettes, revealing such close similarity in both iconography and style, is unique among Avalokiteśvara images from Java. In all other groups, there is more individual variety. A few more bronzes that could fit in this group, have been excluded because of a lack of a Buddha figure in the *jaṭāmukuta* or other differences in iconography and style, such as the left hand being held behind the body (Cat. nos 143-150). However, these bronzes have been included in the catalogue, along with the available information. Two of these (Cat. nos 144 and 145) show a triad with a Buddha in the centre,

Avalokiteśvara on his right-hand side and a second *bodhisattva* on the other side. Two others (Cat. nos 146-147) have four arms. The first carries a water vessel in the lower left hand; the second has a book in the upper left hand. Furthermore, there is a silver image with a bronze pedestal and back piece that is very similar to the group of related bronze images (Cat. no. 148). Another two-armed image has a back piece with a herringbone band and a foliate rim, but in a different, three-lobed style (Cat. no. 149). The final image (Cat. no. 150) also has a back piece of a slightly different form.

Besides these images, characterised by similar back pieces, are other bronzes of Avalokiteśvara seated in *sattvaparyāṅkāśana* that lack this style of back piece (Cat. nos 151-180). Among these are two-armed and four-armed figures. Those with two arms tend to have the same iconographic features as in the group of eleven discussed above, i.e. the *varada-mudrā* and a lotus in the left hand. Among the four-armed seated Avalokiteśvaras are two further attributes, a rosary and a book. For the back pieces we see simple round ring halos, smaller halos with a herringbone rim and s-shaped foliate as well as one triad with a pearl rim in a northeastern Indian style (Cat. no. 151). This great number of images shows the popularity of the *sattvaparyāṅka*-pose. Yet, outside of Java in Southeast Asia, there are only a few depictions of Avalokiteśvara in this pose. Although the iconographic poses *lalitāsana*, *mahārājālīlāsana* and *sattvaparyāṅkāśana* reached Southeast Asia, we only find Avalokiteśvara depicted as seated in these poses on clay tablets found in the Thai-Malay Peninsula (Pls 6D and 6E). He is also depicted in *sattvaparyāṅkāśana* in one bronze figure from Thailand (Pl. 6G). The popular mode of depicting Avalokiteśvara in Southeast Asia, outside of Java, is in a standing posture, as we saw for the ascetic Avalokiteśvara discussed in Chapter 2.

Two of these Javanese *sattvaparyāṅkāśana* Avalokiteśvara statuettes illustrate a further stylistic development of the back piece seen in the unique group of eleven (Cat. nos 175-176). The silhouette of the back piece has evolved to create a halo effect behind the Bodhisattva's head and on either side of him wings of foliage have sprung out. The type of foliage along the edge of the halo has remained the same though. On the basis of the stylistic evolution of the back piece, I would consider these two bronzes later than the group of bronzes discussed earlier in this chapter, including Cat. no 141. I would date the first of these two to 850-875 CE and the second to 900-1000 CE.

6.4 Conjectural paradigm and identifying workshops

The close similarity between the first nine of the eleven statuettes suggests that they shared the same artist or rather a workshop (Cat. nos 132-140). I use the term 'workshop' rather than focusing on individual bronze workers. A bronze statuette likely had several people working on it. For example, one person in a workshop may have worked on the figure, creating it out of wax, while another worked on the back piece. In a foundry workshop focusing on religious imagery, it would be likely that the workers specialised in specific parts of the casting process. However, as part of identifying a workshop, the hand of an individual artist may also be discerned.

Ginzburg and Davin, who reference the work of Giovanni Morelli, show the importance of small details when studying a piece of art (1980). Morelli developed a paradigm for determining which paintings had been wrongly attributed to certain masters. By examining minor details Morelli was able to establish a type of ‘fingerprint’ for individual artists. These fingerprints did not consist of familiar elements that we have come to associate with individual European artists, but rather of what Sherlock Holmes called “trifles” (Conan Doyle 1991: 71).

Examining these statuettes for trifles rather than for more obvious iconographic details, which easily could have been duplicated, may give us more information on individual workshops, but also their bronze workers. Thus, the textile pattern of the lower garment, the manner in which the left hand is displayed, or a small detail on the back piece, such as the upper, three-pronged leaf design or the half-circle foliage finishing the lower part of the back piece’s frame, may all be significant.

An inspection of the lower garments of these figures reveals that several carry a circle-and-dot pattern (Cat. nos 132-136, 139). The same pattern can be seen in other bronzes of *sattvaparyāṅkāśana* Avalokiteśvara (Cat. nos 144-145, 148-150, 152). Such a pattern would have been relatively simple to add, once the statuette had been cast. Another small feature we can study is the top of the back piece, as to whether or not it shows a three-pronged leaf design. This top leaf can take on a variety of forms: sometimes broad (Cat. nos 134, 136, 138, 141, 144, 147-148) and at other times quite slim (Cat. nos 132-133, 145 and 149).

Another detail, which I consider the most significant, concerns the position of the left hand. In the first nine statuettes, the left hand holds the stem of a lotus at an angle of approximately 45 degrees (seen from the base), and the fore finger and little finger are raised slightly above the two central fingers. We do not see the same depiction of the left hand in the statuette previously in the Domela Nieuwenhuis collection (Cat. no. 141) or the one at the Musée Guimet (Cat. no. 142). We come across the same way of depicting the left hand in other statuettes, including a seated Tārā (Pl. 6A), Śrī or Vasudhārā (Pl. 6B) and a standing Brahmā (Pl. 6C), who carries a water bottle in the same hand.

The specific manner in which the left hand is depicted in the first nine figures of this group confirms my theory that the images were made at the same workshop. The last two statuettes in the group may have been produced by another workshop during the same time period or a few decades later. The slight variations in the foliage on the back piece and the base indicate that these parts were made by various hands, although at times we can identify similar features that could identify a singular artist. One example is the foliage ends in the Nelson Atkins Museum statuette and the Tropenmuseum statuette (Cat. nos 132 and 134).

Examining these nine statuettes together, I suggest that they were produced by the same workshop. There may have been one artist responsible for creating the figures, while others worked on the bases and back pieces. The statuettes should therefore be considered a piece of collaboration within one workshop. Considering the quality of the statuettes, it appears

that the craftspeople were well-practised. Nevertheless, I found it difficult to identify other statuettes that could have originated from this workshop on the basis of the left hand's position. The lotus attribute held in this hand was an iconographic decision, but the manner in which it was held would have been up to the artist to decide. A large number of images, such as Buddha statuettes, could not be compared. They would not reveal the specific manner of depiction for the left hand, as they do not hold an attribute in front of the body.

Morelli used a similar method in attributing works to the correct artist by focusing on a minor detail rather than an obvious characteristic that could easily be imitated (Ginzburg and Davin 1980: 7).¹¹² Thus, we need to look for a detail that appears to be of little importance for the style of the period and its iconography, which is why I have focused on how the left hand is depicted. Another such detail which could be examined, is the way in which the right hand is shown in *varada-mudrā*, and specifically, how the thumb is placed (Cat. nos 133-135). Unfortunately, due to the wear of the statuettes this detail can be difficult to discern, whereas the angle of the left hand is usually still visible, even in the case of wear.

Focusing on the left hand of statuettes, we can attribute several other bronzes to this workshop and the artist who specialised in figure depiction, such as these in Cat. nos 143-144, 146 and 147, illustrating Avalokiteśvara seated in *sattvaparyāṅkāśana*, as well as in the above mentioned Tārā, seated Śrī and standing Brahmā (Pls 6A, 6B and 6C). These three figures also have the dot and circle pattern seen in six of the group of eleven statuettes (Cat. nos 132-136 and 139). I would also include the sorrowful Avalokiteśvara images in Cat. nos 96 and 97 discussed in Chapter 4, as they exhibit a strong similarity, clearly something in which this workshop excelled. In addition, the back piece for Śrī has a similarly broad leaf as seen in Cat. nos 134, 136, 138, 141, 144, 147-148. In view of the Brahmā bronze, we see that the workshop did not solely produce Buddhist images, but also made Hindu statuettes.

This workshop and its bronze workers can be considered unique among the workshops in Central Java for a number of reasons. Firstly, we can trace at least thirteen individual statuettes to having been produced, in part, by this workshop and possibly touched by one specific artist (Cat. nos 132-140, 144, Pls 6A, 6B and 6C). No other groups of images in the area have, as of yet, been attributed to a specific workshop or person. Secondly, the workshop and its bronze casters kept reproducing a specific image, to minute detail, a process not recognisable for any other surviving images in Java.

6.5 Other statuettes with similar back pieces

Other bronze statuettes have a back piece similar to those seen in the group of eleven images discussed above. One of these is a triad with a Buddha figure in the centre, which is now at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (Cat. no. 144). The figure on the

¹¹² One example in Western art of this type of recognisable feature, which a forger would focus on in order to recreate an artist's work, would be the so-called Da Vinci smile (Ginzburg and Davin 1980: 7).

Buddha's right is Avalokiteśvara, based on the presence of the Buddha Amitābha in the *jaṭāmukuta*. There is a lotus in Avalokiteśvara's left hand, held at a 45-degree angle. The identity of the second *bodhisattva* cannot be determined, as the attribute is missing from his left hand and no *stūpa* can be determined in the *jaṭāmukuta*. The back piece's foliage border is similar to those previously discussed, including the herringbone pattern. There is no foliage piece connecting the separate back pieces, unlike in the dyad at the Asian Museum of Art in San Francisco (Cat. no. 139).

A similar foliage piece connecting three back pieces can be seen in another triad, in which the second *bodhisattva* could be identified as Maitreya or Mañjuśrī, as he holds a blue lily or *utpala*, a common attribute for both *bodhisattvas* in Javanese art, usually with a second attribute on top of the flower (Cat. no. 145). Their back pieces have a connecting triangular foliage shape that points downwards. The sides of the base are decorated with lions, but apparently the Avalokiteśvara figure does not hold his hand at an angle of 45 degrees. Just as in the Metropolitan Museum of Art triad, the Buddha displays the *varada-mudrā*.

Two images show a four-armed Avalokiteśvara seated in *sattvaparyāṅkāśana* with a similar back piece. One image is currently in the Museum of Ethnology in Vienna and it displays the *varada-mudrā* and the lotus in the frontal right and left hands respectively (Cat. no. 146). In the upper right hand Avalokiteśvara holds a rosary and in the upper left a book. In the second statuette, we again come across a parasol extended out over the seated figure. It has similar iconographic features as the previous image, except that Avalokiteśvara holds a water bottle in his front left hand rather than a lotus (Cat. no. 147). All these images illustrate the popularity of this style of the *prabhāmaṇḍala* in Central Java at a certain point in time.

The same style of back piece is also found among the sorrowful Avalokiteśvaras (Cat. nos 96-98, 103 and 112). For a standing Avalokiteśvara figure, which is now in the Rijksmuseum, we see a slightly different back piece (Cat. no. 230). The *prabhāmaṇḍala* has the familiar herringbone-patterned rim and the s-shaped foliage has been elongated, in order to encompass the standing figure. These are not the only statuettes with such a back piece, as can be seen in the *Divine Bronze* catalogue (Lunsingh Scheurleer and Klokke 1988: Pls 30 and 32). The same type of s-shaped foliage is also seen along various types of bronze back pieces (Lunsingh Scheurleer and Klokke 1988: Pls 29, 34 and 36). All these statuettes illustrate the popularity of this style of back piece and s-shaped foliage for a time in Central Java. It is possible that there was one workshop in particular that produced this style of back piece.

Other groups of statuettes, such as those examined in Chapters 3 and 4, do not show the same strong similarity within the group. This suggests that their production cannot be linked to a single workshop, but rather to several different ones spread out over Central Java. We only have one find site for one of the statuettes with this type of s-shaped foliage and that is Klaten, near Plaosan (Cat. no. 138). This limited statistical sample does not allow us to assume that the original workshop was located within the region.

However, the possibility remains, considering the number of temples built in the area, but we would need more evidence to make a definitive identification.

I suggest that this style of back piece developed towards tighter foliage along the rim (Cat. nos 83, 109-111 and 175-176), as well as wings on either side of the depicted figure (Cat. nos 175-176). An example of this is Cat. no. 175 with wings on the back piece, in which we see a shift towards the East Javanese style, with pointed lotus petals on the seat. Another bronze statuette, with a find site near Magelang (Cat. no. 176), illustrates the same style of wings and the tighter foliage. Due to this difference in foliage, I consider it a later production than the group of 11 *sattvaparyāṅkāśana* Avalokiteśvara statuettes.

6.6 Iconographic and chronological relationship with stone images

Bronzes from Insular Southeast Asia often lack inscriptions that could have helped with dating. Lunsingh Scheurleer identified the style of a few images from our group of *sattvaparyāṅkāśana* Avalokiteśvaras as a “purely Central Javanese style” (Lunsingh Scheurleer and Klokke 1988: 30). She defined this style on the basis of a number of stylistic and iconographic characteristics, namely the *sattvaparyāṅkāśana* and a back slab high and broad enough to frame the figure, which was cast together with the seat and back slab (Lunsingh Scheurleer and Klokke 1988: 30). She dated statues that display this style between the second half of the ninth century and the early tenth century.¹¹³ However, this seems too late for the present group of Avalokiteśvara images, in view of links with several stone *in situ* images at Borobudur and the Plaosan complex, the dating of which is more straightforward.

The first stone *in situ* image, with an iconography similar to the *sattvaparyāṅkāśana* Avalokiteśvaras is the last relief with an Avalokiteśvara on the fourth gallery of Borobudur (Cat. no. 131). This relief is part of the *Bhadracarī* depictions, discussed in Chapter 5. Avalokiteśvara faces the viewer and sits in *sattvaparyāṅkāśana*. His right hand displays the *varada-mudrā*, but his left hand is missing. There is, however, a large lotus bud facing the Bodhisattva’s head, indicating that he held the stem of a lotus in his left hand, as in the group of eleven images. We can clearly see the figure of the Buddha Amitābha at the front of the tall *jaṭāmukuta*. Thus, we have an *in situ* stone image of Avalokiteśvara to compare our 11 statuettes to in order to establish their approximate date. Borobudur is generally dated between 775 – 860 CE, taking circa 75 years for its construction (Dumarçay 1991: 5). This broad time period does not give us an exact date for the fourth gallery reliefs, but can place this type of iconography in the middle of the Central Javanese period. In view of its location on the fourth gallery, I would suggest that it was not carved at the beginning of the building process, but rather towards the end in the first half of the ninth century CE.

Two more stone images of Avalokiteśvara seated in *sattvaparyāṅkāśana* can be found at the Plaosan Lor complex outside the temples and a third at the Candi Prambanan Museum, in the Loro Jonggrang complex (Cat. nos 186-187 and 191). These Avalokiteśvaras display

¹¹³ Lunsingh Scheurleer and Klokke 1988: 80-90, Lunsingh Scheurleer 1994: 79.

an iconography reminiscent of that of the relief image at Borobudur. These Plaosan Lor and Prambanan museum statues no longer have heads, but they carry a lotus with a book resting on top, similar in appearance to the lotuses of the Avalokiteśvara statues inside the Plaosan Lor temples (Cat. nos 184 and 185).¹¹⁴ This helps us identify these headless figures as representations of Avalokiteśvara as well (Pl. 6F).

At least two further stone statues from Central Java show Avalokiteśvara seated in *sattvaparyāṅkāśana*. They are no longer *in situ*, but preserved at the Sonobudoyo Museum in Yogyakarta (Cat. nos 188 and 189). In one of the statues we see Avalokiteśvara's right hand resting on the right knee in *varada-mudrā*, while the left hand lies in front of the body, holding the stem of a lotus bud (Cat. no. 188). This statue shares stylistic features with the Avalokiteśvaras at the Plaosan Lor complex. They each wear two necklaces, a waist belt, a sash *yajñōpavīta*, two armbands on each arm and bracelets, suggesting that the Sonobudoyo statue could be from the same period as the Plaosan Lor image (Cat. nos 184 and 185). Even though the *jaṭāmukuta* of the Sonobudoyo statue shows slight differences compared to those of the Plaosan Lor Avalokiteśvaras, the stylistic features are similar in terms of the number of armbands and the presence of a chest belt. Each of these chest belts consists of a similar central piece in lozenge shape. The chest belts of Avalokiteśvaras inside the temples at the Plaosan Lor complex have a curl and floral pattern around the centre, while the decoration is framed within a rectangular silhouette. The chest belt worn by the two-armed Avalokiteśvara at the Sonobudoyo Museum has a triangular shape that points upwards and the sides are beaded.

The Avalokiteśvara images inside the temples at the Plaosan Lor complex are seated in *lalitāsana* instead of *sattvaparyāṅkāśana*. While the right hand displays the *varada-mudrā*, as in the bronzes, the lotus held in the left hand is in full bloom rather than bud-shaped as in the bronze statuettes. The Plaosan *lalitāsana* Avalokiteśvaras also show a stylistic link to the statuettes, as they have been given a petal-shaped back piece similar to those of the eleven bronzes. The ornamentation differs, however; the stone *prabhāmaṇḍalas* do not carry the border of s-shaped foliage or the band with the herringbone pattern seen in the statuettes. Instead they are decorated with a border of flames and a band consisting of circles alternating with small flowers.

While trying to date the group of similar bronze images (Cat. nos 132-140), we need to realise that they belong to a period when both Buddhist and Hindu bronzes were produced on a large scale in Central Java. As the power centre shifted from Central Java to East Java there was a rapid decline in the production of bronze statuettes, although bronze ritual objects continued to be produced (Lunsingh Scheurleer and Klokke 1988: Pls 64-113). This gives us a limited time frame for the production of Buddhist bronzes in Central Java, from approximately 700–930 CE. On the basis of *in situ* inscriptions, the Plaosan complex has been dated to 825-850 CE (De Casparis 1958: 33), and the temple images likely date from the same period.

¹¹⁴ The lotus is a common iconographic feature for Avalokiteśvara, other *bodhisattvas* in Javanese Buddhist art tend to hold a blue lily, with one of their attributes resting on top of the flower.

In contrast to ideas that there is little relationship between bronze and stone Central Javanese imagery, both the bronze Avalokiteśvaras and the stone images discussed in this chapter indicate a similar tendency towards uniformity. Based on the visible links with stone imagery, I date the bronze images earlier than Lunsingh Scheurleer (1994:84). Different factors affect the dating of these bronze statuettes, such as the iconographic and stylistic similarities between the bronze statuettes and the *in situ* stone images at Borobudur and the Plaosan Lor complex. A further factor to take into consideration is that the art of the Plaosan Lor complex appears to date from a period when a uniform ornamental style was developed. Research on the ornamentation of Central Javanese monuments shows that it is particularly during 825-850 CE that a uniform Central Javanese style developed over a large area (Klokke 2008: 159, 161). Taking these factors together, the group of *sattvaparyāṅkāśana* Avalokiteśvara statuettes, in their uniform style, may be dated to the second quarter of the ninth century.

6.7 Conclusion

A group of eleven statuettes of Avalokiteśvara seated in *sattvaparyāṅkāśana* is unique in displaying close iconographic and stylistic similarities. Despite the lack of information regarding the provenance for most of the individual statuettes, the stylistic features of the extended parasol and the harmoniously proportioned figures indicate that these bronzes originate from Central Java, along with the find place of one of them in Klaten, near Yogyakarta (Cat. no. 138).

They truly represent a specifically Central Javanese idiom in both iconography and style. The resemblance between these eleven images suggests that most of them were produced during the same time period and likely by the same workshop (Cat. nos 132-140). This is the first workshop in Central Java to have been identified based on its image production. This workshop may have employed a specific method of remaking the same style of image, a method not seen elsewhere in Java. The common occurrence of a back piece with a herringbone pattern and foliate rim, as in these eleven statuettes, shows the impact of this workshop, specifically on imagery of Avalokiteśvara in other sitting postures and that of other deities, both Buddhist and Hindu.

The origin of the last two images in this group of eleven similar images (Cat. nos 141 and 142) remains uncertain. They were likely produced by different workshops. However, the apparent attempt to create a similar, petal-shaped back piece indicates that these statuettes were produced in order to emulate the other nine bronzes. The questionable features of the statuette from the Domela Nieuwenhuis collection could be due to a development in style or the hand of a different bronze caster (Cat. no. 141). As for the second statuette (Cat. no. 142), the presence of a water vessel (an unusual feature for Javanese two-armed Avalokiteśvaras, but common for six- or eight-armed Avalokiteśvaras) could support Le Bonheur's theory that it is a forgery (1971: 150). Yet, considering the new technical research, the statuette is likely not a forgery, but was produced at another workshop during the Central Javanese period.

Stylistic, as well as iconographic characteristics, relate the bronzes to a relief in the fourth gallery of Borobudur. The petal-shaped back piece of the bronzes is also found in images at the Plaosan complex, dated to 825-850 CE. These connections can aid us in narrowing down the time of production for the statuettes. Using these stone images as a guide for dating, I suggest that these bronze images were produced in Central Java in the second quarter of the ninth century, thus slightly earlier than suggested by Lunsingh Scheurleer (Lunsingh Scheurleer and Klokke 1988: 83). Central Javanese art became more uniform in the second quarter of the ninth century, at the time of Plaosan Lor. This unique group of bronze images illustrates this development, and also reveals a stylistic and iconographic connection with Avalokiteśvara in stone as depicted on Borobudur and at the Plaosan Lor complex. Moreover, the only statuette of this type that has a known find site relates to the Klaten region, also the region where the Plaosan Lor complex is located (Cat. no. 138). I suggest that the tenth bronze in this unique group (Cat. no. 141), is a slightly later production, based on the style of the base. Other stylistic signs of a production after 850 CE are a tighter s-shaped foliage, increase in jewellery and wings as part of the back piece.



Plate 8. Two-armed Avalokiteśvara seated in *lalitāsana* inside Candi Mendut, Central Java (Cat. no. 181).