



PLATE I.

Seated figure of the Maitreya from Lung Mên, 512 A. D.

MAITREYA AND GUARDIANS

THE dating of early Chinese Buddhist sculpture is based, of necessity, on two classes of objects, first those that bear authentic dated inscriptions, the second those that come from the sites of cave temples which we know to have been created in definite epochs. Of the former the Museum is fortunate in owning several outstanding examples, as well, of course, as numerous unmarked pieces which in quality and character speak for themselves. It has, however, been a matter of possible regret that heretofore in the collections there have not been numbered any pieces from the great sites upon the study of which so much of our knowledge in this field depends.

This lack has now been splendidly remedied. By a fortuitous exchange, three pieces of singular moment have been added to the Museum's collections of Chinese stone sculpture. Two of them—a pair of striking Guardian Figures, illustrated in the accompanying plates—come from the well known Cave Temples of T'ien Lung Shan in Shansi Province. The third, a particularly appealing and charming piece, comes from the equally noted caves of Lung Mên, in Honan. All three are outstanding examples of the best of workmanship associated with these two sites, long famous for the artistic merit of their early Buddhist sculptures.

The seated figure from Lung Mên, measuring but 23 inches from toes to coronet, will inevitably be a loved addition to the collections in Harrison Hall. It comes from a cave which contains a dedicatory inscription with a date corresponding to 512 A. D. This cave is one of the most beautiful at Lung Mên, its every inch of surface once ornamented with sculptures, which, though primitive in concept, are nevertheless

as sensitive and spiritual as anything ever wrought by the early Chinese Buddhists. The Museum's figure measures up to the best. It is a representation of the Buddha Maitreya—the compassionate one—who was particularly venerated by the early Chinese Buddhist and widely represented in the chapels of Lung Mên and Yün Kang. He was in this epoch regularly represented in the pose we here find him, seated on a high throne with knees outspread and ankles crossed. He seldom bears any distinctive attributes, and his costume consists of a small jacket about the shoulders, the front edges of which are prolonged to make streamer-like scarves which are crossed through a ring at the waist and whose ends fall to the lap and over his knees. A pleated skirt, tied in at the attenuated waist, falls in lovely, sharp folds across the thighs and legs and spreads out over the throne. Upon the diety's head a high flaring crown rests on the parted hair which falls in two simple plaits over each shoulder. His right hand is raised in the *abhaya* mudra, which to the initiated is as if the god was saying 'fear not, I am the compassionate one'. The left hand rests idly on his knee.

The figure is carved in the grey limestone characteristic of the Lung Mên cliffs, and it has attained a rich ebony patina by the passage of time. In chiseling the figure from the cave wall, it was apparently broken across at the waist, but here is the only indication of repair or restoration. While the composition of the whole figure is wholly delightful, it is the expression of the face—so simply rendered, so appealingly spiritual—that gives a special character to this work of an unknown artist of the early Sixth Century.

The pair of Guardian Kings, vigorous, domineering and forthright, provide an interesting contrast with the subtlety of the Maitreya figure. In date they are perhaps two hundred years later and can be assigned to the first half of the Eighth Century, a period when many of the most beautiful carvings at T'ien Lung Shan were executed, although the site is also notable for a considerable group of earlier pre-T'ang Dynasty cave temples. The figures are executed in the full round and are of the characteristic coarse light grey limestone typical of sculpture from this area. They stand solidly on low, shaped bases which in turn either rested directly on the cave-floor or possibly on plinths at the entrance to a cave. Originally they were apparently fastened to the floor or held steady against the wall by metal clamps, holes for which are visible at the back of the base of each figure.



PLATE II. Pair of Guardian Kings. First half of the Eighth Century A. D.



PLATE III. Head of one of the Guardian Kings.

The story goes that these guardian figures were removed from the site several decades ago, probably before the time of the full photographic studies that have been made in recent years. Sirén or Tokiwa and Sekino would scarcely have overlooked recording them.

Just under life-size they stand armed, cap-à-pie, in the traditional leather and quilted uniforms of warriors of their day. Much of the earlier coloring remains: whether these patches are contemporary with the actual carving or not we have no means of telling—certain areas are covered with a slightly raised basketwork pattern in gesso, which was painted red and gilded, a technique apparently developed during the T'ang Dynasty. The remains of this surface decoration and of the colors enable us to recreate the appearance of the figures when first erected. It should be noted that the nose of each has been broken and later skillfully restored.

Like the other sculpture in this particular group of cave temples at T'ien Lung Shan, there is an unusually strong Indian influence in the features of these Guardians, particularly to be observed in the one with the crisply carved mustachios and chin whiskers. The armor, however, is typically Chinese and bears a close similarity to that found on pottery tomb figures of guardians that belong to this same epoch.

Almost all Buddhist shrines from the earliest times were provided with some sort of guardian figures. The early sculptors were not too familiar with the details of Indian Buddhist iconography, and at first these guardians seem to have been representations of Vajrapani—the bearer of the thunderbolt, and the special bodyguard of the Buddha. He was usually shown in duplicate, one representation of him on either side of the shrine entrance, scantily clad in flowing loin cloth and displaying exaggerated muscular development as befitted an able bodyguard. Later the two Vajrapani—known as dvarapalas—became confused with the four lokapalas or guardians of the four quarters and of the four classes of demons.

It is probable that we have in the present guardians such a not uncommon confusion; there may have been four such figures originally, but it is not likely. It seems rather more acceptable to believe that two of the lokapalas were here chosen to stand for the dvarapalas and perform their function as guards. If this is so, then the bearded guardian represents Kuvera (Chinese: To Wen), Guardian of the North, one of whose usual attributes is a banner carried in the right hand; there is a hole

in his raised right fist that could well have accommodated the staff of such a banner. His smoothshaven colleague would then be Virudhaka (Chinese T'seng Chang), Guardian of the South whose attribute is a sword.

In any case the figures have extraordinarily vivid personalities and woe betide the hapless demon or even more unfortunate mortal who incurred their wrath. They take worthy place among the great works of art from Ancient China and make even more notable the Museum's collections in this field.

H. H. F. J.