



Fragment of a seated figure of Buddha

Dainichi Nyorai

On display

Title/Description: Fragment of a seated figure of Buddha Dainichi Nyorai

Born: 1000 c.

Object Type: Figure, Fragment

Materials: Lacquer, Wood

Measurements: h 556 x w 300 x d 160 mm

Accession Number: 544

Historic Period: Heian period (Late) (AD 897-1185), 9th century

Production Place: Asia, East Asia, Japan

Credit Line: Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1973

The extant part of this figure is carved from a single block, a technique (*ichiboku-zukuri*) which began to disappear, with the exception of the provinces, from about the mid eleventh century onwards, when the hollowed-out multiple-piece (*yosegi-zukuri*) technique was developed. Here, the extremities of arms and legs were carved from separate pieces and fitted in with metal dowels, but they have now disappeared. There are traces of lacquer, particularly on the back, and the piece must originally have been gilded.

The complete original figure was sitting cross-legged in contemplation, the arms and hands coming together on the lap or in front of the breast in one of the *mūdra* or symbolic gestures. The Buddha Dainichi was considered in some Japanese sects to be the greatest of all the Buddhas, encompassing all Creation within himself. The Chinese characters (which were almost always used for writing Buddhist texts in Japan, sometimes with added aids to understanding in the native *katakana* syllabary) for Dainichi mean 'Great Sun', and hence he had a special meaning for the Japanese who thought of their country as originating from the sun. Dainichi is the only pure Buddha usually shown with a head-dress. Originally this figure had a gilt-metal crown fitting over the extended upper part of the head. A small crystal glass *urna* is fitted into the forehead; the triple folds in the neck also are characteristic of sculptures of a Buddha.

Entry taken from Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection 3 volume catalogue, edited by Steven Hooper (Yale University Press, 1997).

Provenance

Donated to the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia in 1973 as part of the original gift.
