



7105 A wood and gilt-lacquer figure of Amida Buddha standing on a lotus base, the hands in an-i-in mudra and the eyes inset with crystal. The head is adorned with a crystal representing the byakugō (white spiraling hair) on the forehead and the nikkei-shu (red jewel on the protrusion on top of the Buddha's head).

Japan 12th century Heian/Kamakura Period

Dimensions:

Figure and stand: H. 37 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (95.50cm)

Figure: H. 30 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (77 cm)

There are six forms of the an-i-in mudra each representing one of the nine Esoteric Amidas, the so

called Middle and Lower classes. This particular an-i-in mudra formed by the index fingers and thumbs is called Lower Class: Upper Life. It signifies the descent of Amida on the earth to seek the souls of the dead and is one of the most frequently represented forms of Amida.

Lower class mudras are represented by the right hand raised to shoulder level and the left hand reposing on the left knee with palm upward. The circle formed by the thumb and index, a complete form, having neither beginning nor end, is that of perfection and resembles the Law of Buddha, which is perfect and eternal.

Belief in Amida as Lord of the Western Paradise rose in popularity during the late 10th century. Based primarily on the concept of salvation through faith, it was not only a religion which appealed to a broad range of people, but also a direct assertion of piety against the dogmatic and esoteric ritual of the more traditional Tendai and Shingon sects. In Amida's Western Paradise the faithful are reborn, to progress through various stages of increasing awareness until finally achieving complete enlightenment.

Images of Amida, lord of the Western Paradise, are known in Japan from as early as the seventh century. Until the eleventh century the deity was most frequently portrayed in a gesture of teaching and was worshipped primarily in memorial rituals for the deceased. However, in the last two centuries of the Heian period worshippers started to concentrate more on the Teachings Essential for Rebirth written by the Tendai monk Genshin (942-1017). The teachings describe the horrors of Buddhist hell and the glories of the Western Paradise that can be attained through nembutsu, meditation on Amida or the recitation of the deity's name.

Despite the apparent absence of formal variations in the images themselves, during the latter part of the Heian period important changes did occur in the nature of the rituals held in front of the Lord of the Western Paradise. By the twelfth century Image Halls dedicated to Amida were the ritual centres of most complexes. The function of memorial services was expanded so they benefited not only the dead, but also the living. Even rituals with no historical connection to the deity, such as the important services at the start of the New Year, were held there. Of particular significance were the novel ritual practices that were held to guarantee one's rebirth in Amida's Western Paradise. Some, such as the re-enactment of the descent of Amida, or the passing of

one's last moments before death clutching a cord attached to the hands of the deity, were entirely new whilst others, including the use of halls dedicated to Amida as temporary places of interment, reflected the fusion of more ancient practices with doctrines of rebirth.

For a similar wood and gilt-lacquer sculpture of a Shaka Nyorai in the collection of Museum Rietberg, Zurich see: Kamakura. Realism and Spirituality in the Sculpture of Japan, Asia Society Museum, Yale University Press, 2015 p.110-1, pl.29 and for a similar Amida Nyorai in Amida-ji, Shiga Prefecture see: Kamakura. The renaissance of Japanese Sculpture 1185-1333, British Museum Press, 1991, pl.16

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