Seated Buddha Amitabha (Amita) (The Buddha of Infinite Light)

Primary Maker
Unknown Artist

Date
15th century

Medium
Cast bronze with traces of gilding

Dimensions
7-1/4 x 5-1/4 x 3-5/8 in. (18.4 x 13.3 x 9.2 cm)

Credit Line
Purchase, Brooks McCormick Jr. Fund

Object number
1999.2

Type
Sculpture

This seated Buddha Amitabha (Amita in Korean), the Buddha of Infinite Light, is one of a handful of preserved Buddhist cast bronze statues from the early Joseon dynasty (1392–1910). In the Pure Land sect of Buddhism, which was popular among devout members of court, the aristocracy, and commoners throughout the Joseon dynasty, the Buddha Amitabha assures personal salvation and rebirth in his realm, the Western Paradise, by means of the faithful evoking his name with great reverence. Seated in a pose of introspection, this figure rests his hands in his lap in the <i>dhyana mudra</i> of meditation. The <i>Flower Garland Sutra</i>, a Buddhist holy text that was especially influential during the Goryeo dynasty (918–1392), describes individual motifs seen on this bronze. This sutra enumerates symbols identifying the host of Buddhas who make up a limitless heavenly realm that encompasses all Buddhist paradises, including the Western Paradise of the Buddha Amitabha. The most popular of these (and depicted in most surviving Goryeo Buddhist paintings) appear on this bronze: the auspicious <i>shrivatsa</i> (swastika) on the Buddha’s chest, and on his palms, chakra motifs, symbolizing the ever-turning Wheel of the Law (<i>dharma</i>) of Buddhist faith. Even the elaborate, floral patterned edges of the Buddha’s robes invoke the lotus-filled Buddhist paradises described in the <i>Flower Garland Sutra</i>. 