

25. ROOF TILE

2nd–7th century

Terra cotta, H: 15.3 cm × W: 16 cm × D: 4.6 cm

Museum of Vietnamese History, Ho Chi Minh City, BTL5 9168/1

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Ian Glover, "Decorated Roof Tiles from Ancient Simhapura—an Early Cham City in Central Vietnam," in *Studies and Reflections on Asian Art History and Archaeology: Essays in Honour of H.S.H. Professor Subhadradis Diskul* (1995), 311–22. He notes that Janse excavated similar tiles at the Tam Tho kilns near Thanh Hoa in 1937, 317. It is more likely the Tra Kieu examples were produced locally, but a kiln site has not yet been discovered.

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Glover, "Decorated Roof Tiles," 318.

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Ibid., 316.

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Ibid., 319, notes the closest similarity is in the face tiles from the seventh-century Korean Miruk-sa Temple, Iksan, Chollabuk-do Province.

Beginning in the Shang period, c. 1600–c. 1050 B.C., the Chinese produced circular, molded roof tiles that continued in use on the roofs of wooden buildings up to modern times; in Viet Nam, production began during the Han period (206 B.C.–A.D. 220), when Chinese influence was heavily felt.⁸ The excavation of Tra Kieu in Quang Nam Province, capital of a Cham polity at various times between the fifth and eleventh centuries, revealed these circular tube tiles in an early sequence that has been dated to the beginning of the Christian era.⁹ The tiles with faces, which exhibit a great diversity in their molded décor, vary in diameter from 11 to 27 centimeters.¹⁰ Unlike Chinese tiles that are adorned with characters, and less frequently, with stylized birds or other animals, the Cham tiles tend to display faces that can either be fierce and demonic, or more friendly.¹¹

This example has a finely modeled human nose, eyes, and bared, broad lips that reveal a row of uniform teeth, while other lines of the face appear fanciful or seem to allude to an animal. The fringe

along the chin and the fat curls at the top of the head suggest a lion, yet the abstracted lines of the cheeks and the finial at the center of the forehead suggest a more fantastic beast. A single raised edge encircles the deeply inset (approximately two centimeters) image. The piece is clearly molded and mass produced. The upper back of the tile would have extended in a semicircular curved portion that would have overlapped with the other roof tiles rising up the incline of the roof.