

Nha Trang is another possible location for a ship to have anchored at that time and was undoubtedly thriving, if the discovery of the earliest Sanskrit inscription of length discovered in Southeast Asia is any indication. The Vo Canh inscription has been variously dated from the first to the fifth century, and is most probably dateable to the fourth century.¹⁴ It records a donation during the time of the otherwise unknown royal family of Sri Mara.

Our primary sources for understanding the economic and cultural exchange between the polities of Champa and the countries with which they came into contact are the stone inscriptions, such as the Vo Canh stele, along with the temples where many of them are found. The inscriptions, by their use of Sanskrit language and an Indian script, tell of connections with India, while their content and form also point to India as a model. The form of the dedications emulates that of Indian inscriptions, both in the religious content and in the laudatory descriptions of the rulers who established the temples. While specific Brahmanical religious texts can only occasionally be identified, Hindu deities (and less frequently Buddhist figures) are repeatedly invoked.

The earliest Southeast Asian inscription in an indigenous language (Cham) was found at Dong Yen Chau in the Thu Bon River valley. This region in Quang Nam Province is rich in architectural remains, particularly at My Son, considered to be the most sacred of the Cham sites, with its seventy temples. There Bhadravarman, a fifth-century king, established his temple to Shrisanabhadresvara. As an abode of the Hindu god Shiva, to whom most of the Cham temples were dedicated, King Bhadravarman dedicated a *linga* that combined Shiva's name (Ishvara) with his own. Subsequent kings honored this deity, as a number of inscriptions remark, for they sought legitimacy by following the example of Bhadravarman.

Unfortunately, the temple that King Bhadravarman dedicated is no longer extant, having burned down in the sixth century, though some believe it stood at the site of My Son B1, while the location of the inscription in front of A1 may suggest that site. My Son E1, dateable to the seventh century, is the earliest extant temple in Champa. Until its recent reconstruction, little but sculpture and a large carved pedestal remained.¹⁵ Like the early Hindu temples of India, the Cham Hindu temple is a structure with a chamber entered by a single door (fig. 3). Constructed of brick, its exterior walls and tower are carved with walls articulated with pilasters, moldings on the base and superstructure, and niches containing figures. A multitude of minor figures associated with the central deity are carved on the temple's exterior. In India, the arrangement of these minor heavenly beings often follows a clear iconographic program, but one that varied from region to region, while minor buildings and porches with different purposes were generally arrayed leading up to the main shrine. A clear iconographic plan is less evident in the sculpture of Cham temples than in India, in part because much of the stone architectural and freestanding sculpture has been removed. In many instances, the temples' carved brick exterior relief figures lack attributes and are thus unidentifiable. Furthermore, the sites were restored and buildings added over centuries, so any original plan has been obscured.

Hindus worship individually rather than as a congregation, so the interior of a Hindu temple is small; Sanskrit texts call it a womb chamber (*garbha griha*). In India, the *garbha griha* holds a single image; in the case of a Shaivite temple, often a *linga* (phallic symbol) mounted on a *yoni* (female symbol). In both India and Champa, the chamber is dim, lit only by candles and whatever sunlight pours through the single entrance. Unlike

FIG. 3
My Son C1, renovated in the 10th century.

