

of the deities that “peopled” that temple. Though more of their energies were directed at the Cambodian temples of Angkor, the French excavated and restored numerous *thap* Cham (temple towers) in the early part of the twentieth century. In the past twenty years, the Vietnamese, in many instances with foreign assistance, have continued the work begun by the French. Through these recent excavations, our understanding of Cham temple architecture has greatly expanded.

Restoration projects (in 1989 and 2000) of the three eleventh-century temple towers of Chien Dan, in Quang Nam Province, revealed a previously unknown base and a series of buildings leading up to the temple. The French had found carvings of dancers and lions at the ruined site of Tra Kieu and had always assumed their original placement around the base of the building. With the discovery of the Chien Dan relief sculptures depicting dancers, lions, and from the *Ramayana* figures/and *Mahabhasata*, their supposition was proven correct (fig. 8).

The discovery of these basement reliefs has inspired additional excavation at other temples, among them the nearby Khuong My (early tenth century; it consists of three towers), where clearing the dirt from a side of the basement of the south tower has revealed panels depicting a portion of the *Ramayana*. Because clearing the dirt away from that one side of the base has caused the tower to begin to lean (attempts to strengthen the foundation are under way), it has not been possible to complete the excavation.

At My Son, in Quang Nam Province, where the largest concentration of temples (dating from the seventh to eleventh centuries) lies in a valley at the foot of the sacred Mahaparvata Mountain (fig. 9), the recent clearing of the base of My Son G1 revealed a series of *kirtimukha*, the faces of glory that avert malignant influences, but which, elsewhere in India and Southeast Asia, are placed over a door, window, or niche.

In a region where relief sculpture was primarily found on altars, these new excavations will require a rethinking of Cham art and architecture. They may indicate more complex iconographic programs than have previously been suspected. (An ongoing restoration, farther south in Binh Dinh Province, where temples were constructed later and in a different regional style, has also exposed relief sculpture of frontal lions around the temple base. A series of frontal lions supports the basement of the uppermost temple of the Banh It compound.)

The second discovery at Chien Dan was the series of buildings within an enclosure leading up to the three main towers, which give the impression that the complex was conceived as a unified whole. Groupings of other extant temples in enclosures, such as those at My Son, groups A (now largely destroyed), B, and C, appear to have grown organically over time; any original plan is now unclear. The findings at Chien Dan may inspire more extensive excavations at the many Cham sites surveyed in the early twentieth century and identified as having multiple buildings. It may be possible to come to a better understanding of the complexity of Champa religious ritual.

Chien Dan, like Khuong My, lies in the Thu Bon River area in Quang Nam Province, where a cluster of inscriptions dating from the late fifth to early eighth centuries occurs. Beginning at the end of the eighth century, inscriptions are found in the south around Phan Rang, a few in Nha Trang,<sup>30</sup> and then, in the mid-ninth century, they show up again in the Thu Bon valley.<sup>31</sup> The grouping of numerous inscriptions is probably our best evidence for the ascendancy of one Champa river basin—and port—over

FIG. 9  
Mahaparvata Mountain, My Son, Quang  
Nam province.

