

66. NATARAJA

Phong Le, Da Nang Province, 10th century
Stone, H: 100 cm × W: 145 cm × D: 25 cm
Da Nang Museum of Cham Sculpture, 15.3

While the *linga* was the most common form of Shiva enshrined in the interior of a temple, the tympanum over the temple entrance depicted Shiva as Nataraja (King of the Dance). As Nataraja, Shiva dances the world into being, then destroys it, thus demonstrating the cyclical nature of existence. Texts describe the musicians—Sarasvati playing the *vina*, Brahma the cymbals, and Vishnu playing the drums—and the multitudes that assemble to witness the celestial dance.

The Cham envisioned the scene in a variety of different ways. Shiva may dance alone, or less frequently, with attendants, as he is shown here. The female playing the *vina* and the male the drums may well be Sarasvati and Vishnu, but the remainder of the entourage does not correspond with any known text. The floating figures with hands pressed together in *anjali mudra* are *kinnara* (half-bird and half-human celestial figures) who pay obeisance to the great god. The standard iconography of the dancing Shiva includes

a set of attributes and *mudras*, but the Cham artist has set them aside in favor of depicting his sixteen hands, each in an identical gesture.

The active pose and the swirling arms are well suited to the arched form of the tympanum. The artist plays smooth surfaces against the detail of headdresses and jewels. Shiva's headdress contains a crescent moon, one of his identifying characteristics, as is the *naga* (snake) that curls around his upper arm like an armband.

LITERATURE

Pierre Baptiste and Thierry Zephir, eds., *Trésors d'art du Vietnam: la sculpture du Champa v–xv siècles*, 2005; Emmanuel Guillon, *Hindu-Buddhist Art of Vietnam: Treasures from Champa*, 2001.