

67. VISHNU

Phu Hung, Quang Nam Province, 11th century

Stone, H: 88 cm × W: 88 cm × D: 21 cm

Da Nang Museum of Cham Sculpture, BTDN 940/D82

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Golzio, ed., *Inscriptions of Champa*, 2004; 112, 159, and 162 are examples.



FIG 1

Seventh-century lintel of Vishnu Ananatasayin.

Vishnu imagery comprised the largest corpus of early Hindu sculpture (sixth–seventh century) in Southeast Asia. Vishnu’s appeal lay in his role as the Preserver, one who overcame seemingly insurmountable problems that arose in the form of demonic beings. However, the Cham elite had embraced Shiva by the fifth century, as the installation of the royal palladium, the *linga* Bhadresvara, indicates. Shiva’s appeal may have lay in his connection to mountains, a connection to which both the Khmer and Javanese allude in their inscriptions and in their adoption for themselves of Shiva’s epithet, Lord of the Mountain. Throughout their long history, the Cham rarely dedicated a temple to Vishnu, and his role in the art of Champa was secondary, with a few exceptions, such as the seventh-century lintel of Vishnu Ananatasayin, which describes the birth of the god Brahma (fig. 1). In Cham inscriptions, Vishnu is occasionally mentioned in a minor role, or in exaltation of the king, who is likened to Vishnu.³⁷

Throughout Southeast Asia, artists portrayed Vishnu in his four-armed form, most often standing, but in Cham temples, the format of the tympanum that surmounted doors, mock doors, and win-

dows lends itself to a seated version of the god. This Vishnu was found at the destroyed temple of Phu Hung, along with a number of other sculptures, including a Brahma, monkeys, and elephants. He holds the *cakra* (wheel), a conch, a mace, and a clod of earth. His tiered crown, with its bold lotus petals, his earrings that appear as a string of beads, and the simple treatment of his robe indicate an eleventh-century date. The lotus base of the triangular tympanum is unusual.