

70. GAJASIMHA

Thap Mam, Binh Dinh Province, 12th–13th century

Stone; H: 215 cm × W: 85 cm × D: 103 cm

Da Nang Museum of Cham Sculpture, 38.7

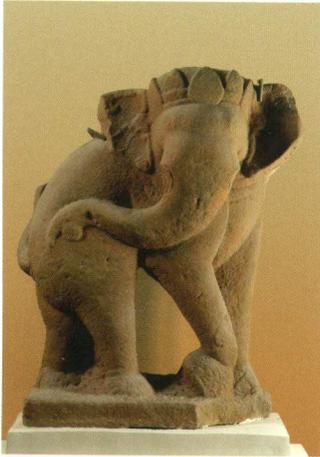


FIG. 3

Elephants were depicted in naturalistic form prior to the Thap Mam style of sculpture.

Although largely destroyed, the site of Thap Mam in Binh Dinh Province yielded a large number of sculptures that included many fantastic beasts. The site was first noticed by Parmentier in 1909, but the sculptures were only retrieved in 1934. Art historians refer to the sculptural style of Binh Dinh, a region that thrived from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries, as the Thap Mam style. It is characterized by its monumentality and the use of big, broad surfaces as background for ecstatic patterning. While anthropomorphic images were found at the site, it is best known for its fantastic beasts.

This *gajasimha* (elephant-lion) stood a good distance from the front of the main shrine and was undoubtedly intended as a guardian figure demarcating the sacred space. It was paired with another *gajasimha*, recently discovered, and now in the museum in Quy Nhon. The scale of the pair would have created a formidable deterrent to anyone with ill intent.

The *gajasimha* has the head of an elephant, though the designs on the cheeks seem to mimic the fur of a lion's ruff. Although elephants were depicted

in naturalistic form in earlier periods (fig. 3), the stylization of the trunk, the eye, and the decoration at the edge of what would have been the ears carries this elephant into the fantastic. The lion body is extremely stylized, both in its overall form and in the treatment of the mane and claws, as well as the anklets and bell necklace around the neck. The caparisoning of the creature merges with the details of its body.

LITERATURE

Pierre Baptiste and Thierry Zéphir, eds., *Trésors d'art du Vietnam: la sculpture du Champa v–xv siècles*, 2005; Claeys, 1934; Jean Boisselier, *La Statuaire du Champa: recherches sur les cultes et l'iconographie*, 1963; Albert Le Bonheur, "The Art of Champa," 1997; Emmanuel Guillon, *Hindu-Buddhist Art of Vietnam: Treasures from Champa*, 2001.