

71. LION

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

Stone, H: 92.2 cm × W: 48.3 cm × D: 39.8 cm

National Museum of Vietnamese History, Ha Noi, LSb 21187

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Guillon, *Hindu-Buddhist Art of Vietnam*,
147–48.

Typical of sculptures of this date are the blocky figures barely sketched in the stone from which they are carved. "Monumentality" was the keyword for the sculpture of Binh Dinh Province, an area where temples first appear in the eleventh century, and fantastic beasts were one of the more whimsical characteristics of the art style.

A number of acrobatic lions were found at the site of Thap Mam, both in an inverted position and upright, including a corner piece, which suggests their original location around the basement of a building. (Other examples of lions are found on a pedestal from Thap Mam.)³⁹ From the earliest period, prancing and preening lions were used to decoratively "support" buildings, although few have been found *in situ*. Their forepaws held

high, they stand on their hind legs and appear to dance, or they strut, wide grins on their faces.

This lion braces himself on his forepaws, using the strength of his legs to figuratively hold up the heavy brick walls of one of the temples of Thap Mam. All is decoration, from his grimacing face to the curling fur on his haunches, so that any implied ferocity is negated by the patterning of claws, teeth, or mane.

LITERATURE

Jean Boisselier, *La Statuaire du Champa: recherches sur les cultes et l'iconographie*, 1963.