

# FOREWORD

SOAS is grateful to the Đà Nẵng Museum of Cham Sculpture for the opportunity to assist in the production of a centenary catalogue of its sculptural masterpieces representing the still too little known sacred art of the ancient people of Champa.

The genius of the Chams was to build, along what is today Vietnam's littoral, one of the earliest internationally active trading polities of the region in the early centuries of the first millennium of the Common Era. The skill of the Chams in shipping and trade brought them early prosperity, which enabled them to discover exceptional gifts for constructing monumental temples in brick and in carving masterpieces in stone that have a vibrancy and human intimacy that made them the Etruscans of early Maritime Asia. The music and dance of the Chams were prized as national treasures by the Việt people, who would in later centuries absorb Cham culture into their evolving movement south.

For a century, the Đà Nẵng Museum has responded to the life and power of this now declining culture by accumulating, with care, passion and great judgement, the world's leading collection of Cham statuary. The international scholars who have contributed to this volume have shared with us their feeling of being enriched by the collaboration with the Vietnamese scholars, whose life-long engagement and expertise have made this work possible. As well as bringing together established Vietnamese and international scholars, the collaboration in the catalogue also brought them alongside young scholars making their first breakthroughs in the field.

The SOAS Southeast Asian Art Academic Programme (SAAAP) promotes research into the Southeast Asia's incomparable monumental heritage sites and associated museum and archive collections. Working with its regional institutional partners, it gears its conferences and summer schools in the region to produce publications like this.

The energy and enthusiasm of Museum Director Võ Văn Thắng and his staff have kept us all motivated and on track, despite the upheaval during the splendid refurbishment and enlargement of the Museum buildings that also marks the centenary.

A special tribute goes to the creativity and professionalism of River Books photographer and CEO Paisarn Piemmettawat, who worked – necessarily at night – amid the disruption, to produce a long series of photographs of the highest quality and sensitivity that from now on will be available to the Museum for its future publications.

Special thanks go to the eminent curators of the Musée Guimet in Paris, Pierre Baptiste and Thierry Zéphir. Their 2005 exhibition and catalogue *Trésors d'art du Vietnam: la sculpture du Champa V-XV<sup>e</sup> siècles* built on the seminal work of Maspéro, Parmentier, Stern and Boisselier to bring Cham art studies into the third millennium. In joining our Editorial Board, they brought research and passion of an incomparable range, depth and originality to our combined work.

The editors owe deep gratitude to the renowned scholars from Cornell, Ball State, the New York Metropolitan Museum, CNRS (Paris), EFEO (Paris), who immediately responded to our invitation to join this volume honouring the Museum's centenary. Tribute is also due to the young scholars of Vietnam, Mumbai, New Delhi and Leiden, whose high quality research brings us all reassurance about the future of Cham studies.

SOAS is where London University studies the cultures and languages of Asia and Africa. In 2013 this small, focused unit received a generous donation from the Alphawood Foundation in Chicago to enhance its teaching in the ancient to pre-modern art and archaeology of Southeast Asia. This enabled the School to appoint three new teachers and to fund scholarships for 15 students a year from Southeast Asian countries, who could not otherwise have studied in London. SOAS is acutely aware, in the present state of the world, of the rarity of such an opportunity to enhance academic work in this region.

We are all indebted to the vision and committed humanism of the people of Alphawood.

Peter D Sharrock, SOAS