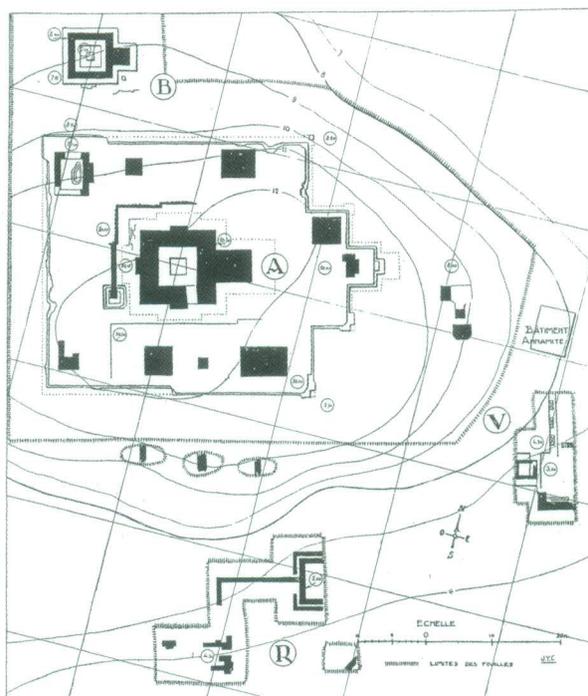


**Fig. 1** Plan of the excavation at Trà Kiệu by Claeys, 1927-28. (Courtesy EFEO)



which he named Point A and Point B (Fig. 1). The first was larger and the second was made of brick and light materials such as wood and tile:

It is possible that on the fortified wall which was uncovered, there was a structure made of brick and other light materials, sheltered by gabled roof and covered by striated tiles (many fragments of which can be found in the rubble), and that following a fire the building collapsed and fell at a westward angle. Tower B would then have been erected at this cluster at some later point in time (Claeys 1928: 585, Pl. XXIII).

**Fig. 2** Trà Kiệu pedestal. (River Books)



The above-mentioned evidence leads to the conclusion that the first religious structures of Trà Kiệu date to the first centuries CE and were made of wood with tiled roofs. They were without high brick walls and hence the interior of these temples must have been the open-sanctum type.<sup>2</sup> Such open-sanctum temples had pedestals with richly carved reliefs, among them the Trà Kiệu *Rāmāyana* pedestal is regarded as the most representative work of narrative sculpture of Cham art (Fig. 2).<sup>3</sup> The large pedestal measures 190 cm<sup>2</sup> and is 54 cm high. Its four sculpted scenes are taken to represent the 'Wedding of Sītā' from the *Rāmāyana*. I have proposed (Trần Kỳ Phương 2000: 51-8) that there could be a link between this scene carved on the pedestal and an inscription by king Prakāśadharmā, who erected of a temple dedicated to Vālmiki, author of the *Rāmāyana*.<sup>4</sup> If such a link can be substantiated, it would raise the question of whether the Trà Kiệu pedestal should be dated to the second half of the seventh century – between 657-87 CE. Simultaneously, in comparing with the archaeological report of the Trà Kiệu excavation by Claeys as quoted above, it can be deduced that the Trà Kiệu *Rāmāyana* pedestal probably belonged to the Point B; because the structure of Point B being a small scale open-sanctum-temple that perfectly corresponded with the dimension of the pedestal (Trần Kỳ Phương 2011: 282).

It should be noted that the date of the pedestal however remains contested. The grounds given here for a 7<sup>th</sup> century date remain uncertain and such a date runs counter for example to the detailed stylistic analysis of Jean Boisselier (1963: 172-206) and Emmanuel Guillon (2001: 110), who concluded that the pedestal belonged to the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Stylistic comparisons are necessarily difficult as there are only three major Cham pedestals with narrative carvings – this Trà Kiệu pedestal, the Mỹ Sơn E1 pedestal and the Buddhist Đồng Dương pedestal. The Mỹ Sơn E1 pedestal was clearly installed as an open-sanctum structure, while a Buddhist one was fixed to the western wall of a darkened closed-sanctum structure. The exact original location of the Trà Kiệu *Rāmāyana* pedestal is not known.

According to Parmentier, Mỹ Sơn E1 is the sole surviving structure which give us a picture of the earliest Cham temples (1909: 401-2). The four remaining square pillar bases in stone, 34 cm in height and 73x50 cm in length, are placed in each of the four corners of the interior, showing that this temple was erected on four wooden