

7 THE SCULPTURE OF CHAMPA: SPECIFICITY AND EVOLUTION

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When we engage the questions of iconography, style and aesthetics, it is important to attempt to determine, in as far as one can, what the 'sculpture of Champa' represents. A few examples will no doubt serve to show the difficulties entailed and, beyond that, what are the main characteristics of Cham statuary.

In a country wholly turned to Śaivism, the cult image *par excellence* is the *liṅga*, as was the case in the regions of India where Śaivism was predominant. The Chams consecrated numerous sanctuaries to this abstract, stylized form of Śiva that represents both his universality and his creative power.¹ Whatever period is under consideration, the relatively simple form of the *liṅga* reveals little by way of art tendencies; in Champa, however, the frequent presence of an ascetic's chignon (*jaṭā*) (cat. 31) and, even more, the golden heads of the *kośa* (metallic 'envelopes' or 'cases' meant to cover stone *liṅga*) allow us to trace its evolution across the centuries and establish the dating of a number of examples that have come down to us. These images, of which the most simple are probably among the oldest, compete with the magnificent in-the-round statues which also represent Śiva but in anthropomorphic form. We don't know what rules determined the choice of a *liṅga* or a statue. Their relative importance is never mentioned in the epigraphy and perhaps there was, among the Chams, no difference in meaning or import between the stylized image on the one hand and the anthropomorphic representation on the other. Further, no change is observable from one period to another, between times during which, for example, sponsors focused on *liṅga* and times when anthropomorphic images were preferred: both types are met with through the whole history of Champa.

The anthropomorphic image however discloses far more about the evolution of forms and, in general, enables a fairly thorough dating. It should be noted here that cult images in Cham art belong either to in-the-round or to

high relief production. The oldest images, up to the 10th century, all seem to belong to the first category (cat. 11, c. 8th century). From this period on, high reliefs usually replace in-the-round images in the cellas of temples. Among the relatively few divinities that the specificities of Cham iconography allow us to identify without difficulty are Gaṇeśa (cat. 6a and 6b), identifiable by his corpulence and his elephant's head, Skanda (Fig 1. See Cat. 32), whose peacock (*mayūra*) mount assures his identity, or Durgā (cat. 56).

Paradoxically, at least if we compare Cham art with say Khmer or Indonesian art, Viṣṇu appears rarely as the principal divinity of a sanctuary (see Cat. 65 Fig. 1). A few images of the god are known, however, that, along with the Śiva statues, allow us to observe the passage from an early tradition where in-the-round predominates, to a later tradition when high relief sculptures take over. As too often in Cham studies, we are faced with a fact that we cannot explain. For the early

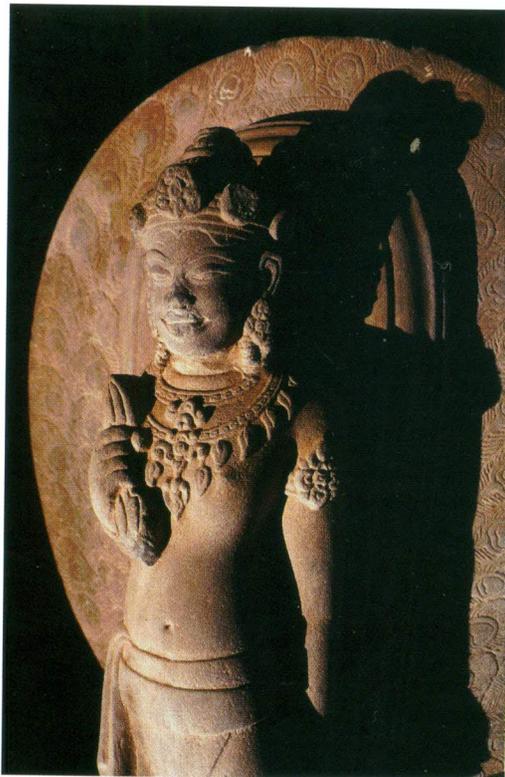


Fig. 1 Skanda with head.
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