

11 THE INSCRIPTIONS OF CAMPĀ AT THE MUSEUM OF CHAM SCULPTURE

ARLO GRIFFITHS, AMANDINE LEPOUTRE,
WILLIAM A. SOUTHWORTH & THÀNH PHẦN

Notice to readers – The following pages are an extract from the introduction to the book *Văn khắc Chăm – Đà Nẵng / The inscriptions of Campā at the museum of Cham sculpture in Đà Nẵng*, published in 2012 by the VNUHCM Publishing House and the Center for Vietnamese and Southeast Asian Studies University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, both in Hồ Chí Minh City, in collaboration with the École française d'Extrême-Orient, in Hà Nội.

Early studies on Campā inscriptions

In the early decades of the 20th century, the renowned scholar George Cœdès compiled an inventory – he also called it a general 'list' – of the inscriptions of Campā, where each inscription received a unique 'C.' number (C = Campā), under which were recorded various types of useful information, such as: the place where the inscription had been found; the place where it was currently located (if it had been moved after discovery); the language(s) used in it; its date; availability of reproductions of it in public libraries; bibliography of publications about the inscription. It is a kind of telephone book for those who wish to study Campā inscriptions. A first version of this inventory was published in 1908, comprising 118 entries; a revised and updated version came out in 1923, and at that time the list comprised 170 entries; supplements published in 1937 and 1942 raised the total first to 196, and finally to 200 entries. After this the inventory fell into disuse, and for many decades there was no central registration of newly discovered inscriptions, so that museums in Vietnam were unable to tell whether Campā inscription in their custody were previously known or new specimens.

And it was not only the maintenance of an inventory that fell into oblivion. After a small handful of publications of inscriptions of Campā by EFEO scholars that appeared in the 1920s and 1930s, the study of these inscriptions, inside

and outside the EFEO, came to a complete stop due to World War II and the subsequent period of Vietnamese struggle for independence and reunification.

At that time, only about half of the known inscriptions had been published, and in general the study of inscriptions in Sanskrit language had received much more attention – at least it had advanced more significantly – than that of inscriptions in Cam. Most Cam-language inscriptions, whose texts had been published, had been published without translations. Even the existing translations were almost never precise renderings of the originals, but rather loose patchworks of understood, guessed and neglected elements of the originals. Despite the very incomplete state of knowledge of the epigraphical record of ancient Campā, several books on art history that were published in the 20th century were heavily dependent on the epigraphical documents. In this situation, a high priority for the study of ancient Campā history is for present scholars to pick up the thread that had been dropped by French scholars in the 1930s.

What objects were inscribed?

We know from Chinese historical sources that writing was already being used in Campā from at least the 3rd century AD. Many different types of document were produced, ranging from diplomatic letters, religious, philosophical and historical texts to tax registers and accounts. The majority of these ancient texts, however, were written on organic (impermanent) materials, such as palm leaf, parchment, wood or paper, and have not survived to the present day. The oldest surviving written texts of this kind appear to date from around the 17th century onwards, although they sometimes preserve older text traditions within them.

For the study of ancient Campā, therefore, we are necessarily dependent on texts written on more durable inorganic materials such as stone, terracotta, brick, bronze, silver and gold. These