

2. Yakṣa (?)

Trà Kiệu, Quảng Nam
5th-6th century
Sandstone: H. 68 cm;
W. 70 cm; D. 16 cm
BTC 136-20.2



In the vocabulary of the different elements of architectural decoration, square slabs of sandstone with little thickness are called metope, an approximation but in use. Metope can be found at the base of structures, at the level of terraces or basements, or at the top of monuments, above or below the cornice of the principal body of the building, or its fictive storeys.

Discovered on Monday 2 April 1928 during Jean-Yves Claeys' excavation at Trà Kiệu, this low relief probably ornamented the lower part of a monument of which apparently no other remnant has been found. This male figure would not have been alone. He was perhaps part of a frieze of alternating sculptures in brick and stone, in the manner well known from other Cham monuments. The *yakṣa* is seated with feet crossed and legs flattened. His hands rest on his hips and thighs at the level of a flat, decorated belt with a circular clasp, embellished with an open flower with four large petals. The garment, held by twisting the cloth at the waist, is smooth and reaches the mid-calf; there is a fold of material in front of which only the top part can be seen above

the belt clasp. The vigorous modelling of the face is made up of strong forms around thick, smiling lips, gathered eyebrows indicated simply by a change of plane in the general economy of the mask. The nose, hooked and large accentuates the strange character of the features. The hair, composed of two rows of large, concentric curls is held at the level of the shoulders by two discoid ear pendants inserted into the distended lobes, and set at an angle to the neck. It looks like a wig and renders unreal the physiognomy of this being. Appearing under a border of leaves, which may have continued onto another block above this one, the figure has the air of a *yakṣa*, minor divinities usually associated with nature and abundance, with which Indian art abounds from the earliest periods.

This piece is hard to date because of its rare characteristics. The treatment of the leaves however is derived from Gupta art, of about the 5th century,¹ and it should probably be attributed a slightly later date (c. 6th century).

1 Michael W. Meister, M.A. Dhaky and Krishna Deva (eds), *Encyclopaedia of Indian Temple Architecture, North India, Foundations of North Indian Style*, New Delhi, American Institute of Indian Studies, 1988, figs. 29 and 31.