

36 lotus petals in two overlapping tiers (II.A), the upper slab (the same size as the lower and got the top of 41 cm long) functions as a cistern or a *yoni* (II.B) and is adorned with lotus petals on its lower face. Part III: original *liṅga* on the top of the pedestal.

Parts I and II were discovered separately in Trà Kiệu village by the end of the 19th century and moved to *le jardin de Tourane* (the location of the present Cham Museum) in 1901 in four pieces, including two broken halves of part I and two slabs of part II (Finot 1901). The pedestal has been assembled in various ways for exhibitions at the museum. Henri Parmentier (1909) hypothesized that the original pedestal must have included a cylindrical part in between two slabs of part II and a *liṅga* at the top. In the first display inaugurated in 1919, the pedestal was restored, including parts thought to be missing, as seen in the photo (Fig. 1).

In 1927-8, big excavations were carried out at Trà Kiệu under the direction of J.Y. Claeys. Among the objects collected from the site, Claeys noticed a circular piece of stone decorated with "female breasts" and he thought must belong to the pedestal. The pedestal was then re-assembled with the breast motif stone placed between the two slabs of part II, replacing the round *tambour* of Parmentier's hypothesis.¹

The Claeys restoration must have been challenged as the circular piece with 'female breasts' motif was removed sometime later. A recent check on the measurements of the hollow centre of parts II. A and II.B showed that the assembly by Claeys was an obvious mistake and has opened the way to a new hypothesis of the structure of the pedestal (Thắng 2011).²

The Claeys photo of the pedestal published in the *BEFEO* of 1931 nevertheless drew scholarly attention to the extraordinary iconographical breast feature which occurs nowhere else in Indian or Indianized art and 'was subsequently to be a standard element in Cham art after the tenth century'. (Guillon 2001: 110; Boisselier 1963: 194, 175)

Fig. 1 Trà Kiệu pedestal displayed in the front court of the museum with the restored cylindrical part in the middle and the restored *liṅga* on the top.
(Archive photo of EFEO, taken before 1935)

As well as varying hypotheses on the structure of the pedestal, the carvings on its base have also evoked various readings. On the four faces of the base³ there are 61 lively figures which were depicted in varied positions, gestures and wearing different garments and ornaments. Jean Przyluski (1930) interpreted the frieze as 'the story of a brahmin armed a magic bow coming to marry a local woman-chief and establish a dynasty'. Geoges Cœdès (1931) rejected Przyluski's theory and interpreted the carvings on the pedestal base as stories of Kṛṣṇa. He said Face C depicts Kṛṣṇa's visit to Mathura city, where he cured the hunchback Trivaka and met with the flower-seller Sudāman. Face B he saw as a scene where merchants present offerings to Kṛṣṇa. Face A told the story of Kṛṣṇa breaking Kamsa's bow, and face D was a dance of salutation to the god by *apsaras*.

Trần Kỳ Phương (1983, 2000) later revised the Cœdès reading and argued that the carvings on the base illustrated the wedding of Rāma and Sitā in the first chapter in the *Rāmāyana* epic. Phương points to correspondences with actions in the epic. He says face A illustrates the royal *ṛṣi* Viśvāmītra, prince Rāma, son of king Daśaratha, and his brother Lakṣmaṇa from Ayodhya going to Mithila city to try to bend the sacred Rudra bow of king Janak, who promised to give the hand of his daughter, princess Sitā, to he who could bend his bow. At the court Rāma (face A 13) raised the bow and broke it to the astonishment of king Janak (A 14) and to the admiration of the gathered monarchs (A 15, 16).⁴

- 1 *BEFEO* XXXI (1931), pp. 309, 310.
- 2 The measurements of the hollow shaft in the centre of part II strongly suggest that the *liṅga* 2.3, which was found at Trà Kiệu, would originally have belonged to this pedestal. In the renovated museum display in 2017, the *liṅga* 2.3 was assembled inside the pedestal replacing the former replica-*liṅga*.
- 3 Henri Parmentier (1909) used the alphabet A, B, C, D to refer to the every face of the base and those codes have been followed by all researchers.
- 4 Phương 2000 referred figure 15 to Viśvāmītra and 16 to king Janak.

