

32. *Linga*

Trà Kiệu, Quảng Nam
10th century
Sandstone: H. 85 cm;
W. 27.5 cm; D. 27.5 cm
BTC 104-2.2



- 1 For the bibliography concerning the inscriptions, refer to Schweyer 1999 (1).
- 2 Translation of Louis Finot; see Finot 1903 (2), p. 209.
- 3 See on this subject S.K. Ramachandra Rao, *Encyclopaedia of Indian Iconography*, Indian Books Centre, Delhi, 2003, p. 1453-1472.
- 4 Boisselier 1963 (1), p. 410-415.
- 5 This type that also prevailed in Cambodia since the pre-Angkorian period (7th century); see Jessup and Zéphir 1997, no. 23, pp. 176-177.
- 6 Certain *linga* are sometimes sculpted from the same block as the lustral basin (*yoni*). One also finds *linga* with only the top part sculpted and placed on the *yoni*. Sometimes, finally, the central part may remain partly visible; see Parmentier 1918, pl. CLXXXII and CLXXXIII.

From the 5th century, the inscriptions recovered from the site of Mý Sơn bear witness to the pre-eminence for the Cham sovereigns of the cult of Śiva (stela C. 72 of Bhadravarman),¹ even though one cannot say precisely which aspect of him is present. A little later, the stela of Mý Sơn dedicated to Śiva then named Śambhubhadreśvara (inscription C. 73 A) however stipulates in its homage to the deity: 'he whose power is inconceivable, he who has no beginning and no end, may he bring happiness to the country of Campā, this Śambhubhadreśvara.'² This allusion to the infinite nature of Śiva 'who has neither beginning nor end' is without doubt a direct reference to the myth of 'the origin of the *linga*' (*liṅgodbhava*) so dear to Śaivas and abundantly recounted in the *Purāṇa*, in the course of which the god shows his pre-eminence over

Viṣṇu and Brahmā in the form of a column of fire having, precisely 'neither beginning nor end'.

This myth, among others, appears to be the origin of the most sacred representation of Śiva as a *linga* ('mark' or 'sign') in the form of a pillar (*sthānu*) recalling this aspect. A cosmic axis, pillar of the universe, the *linga* is also the phallus of Śiva, symbol of the vital, creative power. Several images in India bear very early witness to this ambivalence. Very early too, the images sculpted by man (*mānuṣa-linga*), apart and less venerated than those emerging naturally from the surface of the earth, were soon to be governed by rules determining their form, their proportions and their rites of installation and consecration.³ The *Śiva Purāṇa*, the *Linga Purāṇa* say the pillar, as the pillar of fire, contains in itself the three deities. Brahmā, the creator, occupies the lower part of the *linga*, hidden under the earth. It symbolised the neutral principle. This section, called 'brahmabhāga' is square (*caturaśra*). Viṣṇu, the preserver, occupied the central part masked by the pedestal. It symbolises the female principle (identified here with Devī: the pedestal *yoni*). This 'viṣṇubhāga' is octagonal (*aṣṭāra*). Rudra, the destroyer, appears at the summit (*rudrabhāga*), symbolising the masculine principle. Circular (*vṛttam*) in section, it is the only visible part of the *linga* when it is inserted into the pedestal, and receives the cult (*pūjā*), also named *pūjāṃśa*.

This *linga*, discovered at Trà Kiệu, is a beautiful example of the level of Cham productions according with Indian econometric prescriptions.⁴ It is actually more faithful to the rules than many Indian *linga*. The three equal parts recall a type of *linga* found in the Indian literature under the denomination *sarvasama* ('all identical') but of which we know few examples even in India.⁵ One will note, finally the presence at the summit of a small flaming jewel that recalls perhaps the column of fire we referred to, but which could also appear as a stylised version of the ascetic's chignon (*jaṭā*) of Śiva emerging from his own *linga*.

Although the overall vision of the *linga* here presents an evident didactic interest, we should recall that it never appears in this form in the sanctuaries, but only the top section emerging from the ablution bowl. The image may not be conceived, at base, without its intimately complementary pedestal.⁶

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