

34. Flying warrior

Mỹ Sơn, Quảng Nam
10th century
Sandstone: H. 45 cm;
W. 45 cm; D. 26 cm
BTC 17-44.10



This warrior in the attitude of flight, one leg pulled up under the body, the other trailing behind, belongs to a series found on the approaches to B and C at Mỹ Sơn.¹ Probably originally placed high on the building it decorated, it is part of a poorly defined iconographic ensemble. Taking part in some celestial combat, it evokes perhaps the divine armies or the struggles the turbulent divinities of the atmosphere were engaged in, such as the *marut*, associated with the winds, with the rain, storms and lightning which broke out when these armies clashed.

Treated in the spirit of the simplicity of Trà Kiệu, this warrior, armed with sword and shield, wears jewelry – a low diadem with florets and

ear pendants composed of rings and threaded through distended earlobes – and a costume – a short drape with side pocket and long front fold – identical to that of the dancers with scarves. His hair is more complex and consists of a large ball of hair carried behind the head, a coiffure often represented after the 10th century. This chignon appears natural here whereas it seems forced to the side of the head in many other contemporary or later works;² but it then seems a representation in a 'distorted perspective' to make the chignon – apparently important – visible, when the person wearing it is facing forwards.

1 Understood to come from sanctuary C 1, on which it would have been part of the wall of the principal false-storey, the warrior could also have belonged to group B. A hand-written report on the 'State of work at Mỹ Sơn in January 1942' (archives of the EFEO, section R 31, subdivision Quảng Nam, ruins of 'Mỹ Sơn') states that similar warriors were found after a flood to the southwest of group B and that they probably belonged to an earlier phase of monument B 1 [?] than that we see today.

2 See for example Cao Xuân Phổ 1988, no. 101, p. 103, no. 104, p. 105; Ducrest and Vandermeersch 1997, no. 151, p. 156.