

The dancers with scarves from Trà Kiệu are a rare iconographic group in Champa. Although very numerous on 10<sup>th</sup> century sites, their appearance was sporadic before that date and most notable on the Mỹ Sơn E1 pedestal from the second half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century (cat. 9, fig. 3).<sup>1</sup> There they figure as atlantes supporting the stairs of the richly decorated altar which housed the image of god (a *linga*): a role very different from that which was theirs in Trà Kiệu, where they performed their art on the exteriors of monuments, among numerous other motifs ornamenting the structure's foundation walls. According to the descriptions of Jean-Yves Claeys, they probably alternated with lion and elephants. The origin of these dancers, whirling a long, light piece of fabric with their hands, still remains poorly defined. Should it be sought in China, notably under the Tang (618-907),<sup>2</sup> where long banners were in use in certain court spectacles for the nobility and high dignitaries? (see page 85 Figs. 19, 20) Should we consider it Indian – and so more precisely tied to the world of the gods – and find models in Orissa in about the 7<sup>th</sup> century? The question remains open to debate. One recalls that this theme, uncommon in India, appears on stone screens sculpted for windows in a few temples in Bhubaneśvar in the 7<sup>th</sup> century: that of Paraśurāmeśvara<sup>3</sup> and Kapileśvara, perhaps slightly later.<sup>4</sup>

Suppleness and vigour characterise the dancers of Trà Kiệu. Their summary morphology entails a number of distortions inherent in the dance itself. Thus the acute sway

of the hips and arms in hyper-extension of the elbow seem forced. The majority of dancers found at this site – a good number of them at point A – appear with the torso facing forward and the legs in profile. Whether they are turning to the right or the left, and whatever the detailed variations of their posture (the leg in movement more or less lifted from the ground, the arms more or less held up, etc.), they all conform to the same scheme of a lively rhythmic turn around the earthly residence of the god. Their faces, generally smiling, bear the traits of the style of Trà Kiệu, with softness of contours and modelling and almond-shaped eyes. They sometimes wear pieces of jewelry and they all have a diadem with spear-shaped jewels as well as earrings composed of multiple rings threaded through the lobe. The costume of all the dancers is a short drape held at the waist by a belt, under which is caught one end of the fabric. This leaves a kind of fabric pocket on the thigh and falls forward in a straight fold.

Some of the dancers were said to have come from Khương Mỹ. Henri Parmentier and Philippe Stern were both surprised by this in their time and it does seem that this arose from some confusion when Charles Lemire deposited some of the pieces at Đà Nẵng and the error entered the scientific literature.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps new discoveries will one day confirm this attribution, which is difficult to admit today. Until then, we prefer to consider all the dancers to with scarves as a particularly original motif, specific to the majestic site of Trà Kiệu.

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- 1 See Boisselier 1961.
- 2 See Cat. 'Introduction to Champa' 12. Sinitic transfers into Cham art: tribute, trade and artistic exchange.
- 3 See Michael W. Meister, M.A. Dhaky and Krishna Deva (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Indian Temple Architecture, North India, Foundations of North Indian Style, c. 250 BC-AD 1100*, New Delhi, American Institute of Indian Studies, 1988, fig. 525.
- 4 *Ibidem*, fig. 567.
- 5 See Parmentier 1909 (1), p. 261; 1919 (1), pp. 96-7.