

48. Polo Players

Thạch Hãn, Quảng Trị

10th century (?)

Sandstone: H. 104 cm;

W. 192 cm; D. 70 cm

BTC 38-24.4



- 1 Trường Giang Đố, "Champa and the East Asian Maritime Commerce from the 10th to the 13th centuries," *Advancing Southeast Asian archaeology 2013: Selected paper from the first SEAMEO SPAFA International Conference on Southeast Asian Archaeology* (2015): 377; Tana Li, "A view from the sea: Perspectives on the Northern and Central Vietnamese coast," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 37(1) (2006): 88-89; Georges Maspero, *Le royaume de Champa* (Paris and Brussels: G. Vanoest, 1928); Georges Maspero, *The Champa Kingdom: The History of an Extinct Vietnamese Culture* (Bangkok: White Lotus Press 2002), 2.
- 2 Jean Doloche, *Horses and Riding Equipment in Indian Art* (Madras: Indian Heritage Trust, 1990), 9-20.
- 3 Jean Boisselier, *La Statuaire de Champa: recherches sur les cultes et l'iconographie* (Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient, 1963), 194-196; Emmanuel Guillon, *Cham Art: Treasures from the Da Nang Museum, Vietnam* (Bangkok: River Books, 2001), 132.

In terms of architectural function, this sculpture was likely part of a stairway or a temple foundation. Its rectangular composition is similar to the Wrestlers [24.2-BTC 273] found at Khương Mỹ, Quảng Nam; however, the outer face of this work depicts polo players, a theme rarely illustrated in Cham sculpture. Chinese historical records mention that the Cham people had a high demand for horses, particularly under the Song dynasty (960-1279 CE). Seeing the advantages of horses in battles against the Đại Việt and Khmer empire, Champa kings sent envoys to China seeking horse shipments, yet their orders

were sometimes rejected due to the periodic prohibition of horse exports. This implies that locally raised horses were few in the territory of Champa. They may have been traded to Champa as a highly-valued commodity or granted to Cham kings as diplomatic gifts.¹ The scarcity of horses in Champa in all likelihood explains why horse imagery is rare in Cham sculpture, in stark comparison with the proliferation of elephants and Brahmanical and Buddhist mythical animals. The image of a horse does however appear in some Cham sculptures including Vâyü [BTC 99.2], Đồng Dương pedestal [BTC 177 + 178 22.5], Khương Mỹ pedestal [BTC