

50. Pediment of Dancing Śiva

Phong Lê, Đà Nẵng

10th century

Sandstone: H. 100 cm; L. 145 cm; W. 25 cm

BTC 84-15.3



The site of Phong Lê, some kilometres southwest of Đà Nẵng, was once part of the property of telegraph engineer Camille Paris who re-discovered Mỹ Sơn and Phoung Lê. In 1909 Henri Parmentier said of the site: 'It seems from the information gathered, that several constructions, grouped on the rise, existed in this place. Baluster remains indicate that there were buildings with windows. The extraction of bricks and other materials from the villa of the property and its annexes, brought to light brick pavings (...) and some fragments of sculpture.'¹

Among these was this tympanum in the roughly hewn shape of a half-moon, embedded in an old tradition that was soon to be abandoned. At the centre, admirably set in an

arch, Śiva appears dancing with lunar crescent in his crowned ascetic chignon (*jaṭāmukūṭa*). The dynamism of the movement is felicitously rendered with the sculptor not hesitating to bend the body to enhance the movement. The overall posture and the details of the pose, the movement of the head, the breast, the arms and legs, are not without reminiscence of comparable examples in India where Śiva dances in the same place (the tympanum) in certain monuments of the subcontinent, notably in Karṇāṭaka, in the art of the Cālukya at Bādāmi.²

The 16 arms fan out to reinforce the god's dancing posture, holding all hands in the same gesture, with the exception of the one placed on the hip. The gesture is strange: the thumb

1 Parmentier 1909 (1), p.319.

2 See for example the tympanum embellished with a dancing Śiva above the entrance to the temple of Tāraka-Brahmā at Ālampur (end of 7th century). See Michael W. Meister and M.A. Dhaky, *Encyclopaedia of Indian Temple Architecture, South India Upper Drāviḍadēśa*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1986, pl. 167 and 168.