

54. Seven *līṅga* pedestal

Mỹ Sơn, Quảng Nam

10th (?) century

Sandstone: H. 50 cm;

W. 242 cm; D. 22 cm

BTC 1-2.4



- 1 Henri Parmentier, *Inventaire Descriptif des Monuments Chams de L'Annam*, (Paris, 1909), p. 357.
- 2 If they were *līṅga-kośa* incisions they would have been the same for all *līṅgas*.
- 3 See R. C. Majumdar's translation of inscription no. 16 (st. 6) dated 687 CE and no. 19 *Ancient Indian Colonies in the Far East*, Vol. III, 'Champa' 1927, pp. 31-5.
- 4 We thank Anne-Valérie Schweyer for bringing to our notice inscription C. 99 and also re-confirming the concept of *aṣṭamūrti* as established in Cham inscriptions. (Personal communication 26th August 2017). For a detailed account of this concept, see Chemburkar and Kapoor, 'Paśupata sect in Ancient Cambodia and Champa' in this volume. (pp. 45-56)

During the clearing work at the group 'A' monuments of Mỹ Sơn, Henri Parmentier and Charles Carpeaux uncovered a great number of sculptures, including this unique and somewhat puzzling pedestal with a row of seven *līṅgas* with incisions. Inscriptions from the large temple complex at Mỹ Sơn show there was a theological focus on the eight forms (*aṣṭamūrti*) of Śiva in the 7th and 8th centuries, but Parmentier assumed they were 10th century *līṅgas* that would have originally been placed in the six small shrines surrounding the main 10th century Mỹ Sơn 'A-1' shrine. Parmentier published this object in 1909 under his label S-6.¹ Similar pedestals with five *līṅgas* he labeled S-5, and some broken fragments of another one with two *līṅgas* were also found in the area.

From the different incisions visible on the seven *līṅgas* stone, Parmentier argued that each must have borne an attribute, probably made of precious metal and encrusted with jewels or semi-precious stones. None of the attributes has

been found and they may have been removed long ago. The different incision patterns on each *līṅga* indicate that they could not have been covered by *līṅga-kośa* sheaths.² If we join up the holes in the *līṅgas* to create an outline for different attributes, we may be able to discern, from the reader's left to right, a vase (?), trident, arrow (?), disc horn or crescent moon (?), conch (?) and thunderbolt (?).

Several Cham inscriptional records mention the installation of *līṅgas* and the donation of gold or silver *līṅga-kośas* or covers by various kings, but no inscription specifically mentions such an unusual set of seven *līṅgas*.³ Inscriptions found during the excavation of the A group temples (C. 96, C. 87, and C. 74), which bear inscribed dates to the 7th and 8th centuries, mention 'Śiva's forms like earth', 'eight forms of Īsana', '*aṣṭamūrtiḥ*' ('eight forms'), '*aṣṭau puṇyā ātmabhiḥ*' ('eight holy forms'). They clearly indicate that Śiva was being worshipped in his eight forms centuries before the towering Mỹ Sơn A-1 structure was built.⁴ This veneration may then have continued