

55. Royal court dance lintel

Mỹ Sơn, Quảng Nam

11th century

Sandstone, H. 47 cm; L. 200 cm; W. 45 cm

BTC 2-45.8



Among the 300 or so sculptural reliefs kept at Đà Nẵng, several depict dance and music with a variety of musical instruments that indicates its importance in Cham society. Cham inscriptions frequently refer to dancers and musicians and attest the long fondness for their art.¹ The beautiful and widely published 10th century 'Trà Kiệu dancer' wearing a costume of pearls is an eminent example.

The central kingly figure with a crown in this lintel sits under two parasols and holds a sword. A female figure at his feet holds a little bell (*cheng*). Two dancers wearing crowns on the viewer's left hold their hands above their heads in salutation while their legs are flexed. Two on the viewer's right have a different dance posture. One musician blows into a pipe instrument, one clashes cymbals and one plays a drum. The

celebration of a king holding a sword in public in this manner could indicate a celebration before or after going to war. Inscriptions speak of many 11th and 12th century battles with Khmers, between Cham factions, and with the Đại Việt.

Ethnologist Lê Văn Hào records how dancers and musicians, much prized in Cham society, were taken to the Đại Việt as prisoners. In 982, Lê Hoàn (r. 980-1005), first emperor of the early Lê dynasty, captured a number of singers and musicians in Champa and brought them to his capital at Hoa Lư.² In 1044 emperor Lý Thái Tông invaded Champa with 100 warships because tribute had not been received for 16 years. The Cham king was killed and 5,000 Cham captives were brought back to Thăng Long, including Cham queens, court dancers, musicians and craftsmen. They were

1 R. C. Majumdar, *Ancient Indian Colonies in the far East*, Book 1, Champa, Lahore: Punjab Sanskrit Book Depot, 1927: 231.

2 Việt sử lược [Summary of Vietnamese History], tr. Trần Quốc Vương, Hà Nội: Văn Sử Địa, 1960: 56.