

59. Viṣṇu tympanum

Phú Hưng, Quảng Nam

11th-12th centuries

Sandstone: H. 89 cm;

W. 89 cm; D. 21 cm

BTC 1574-BTĐN 940/Đ82



This Viṣṇu tympanum probably belonged to a large brick temple at Phú Hưng built close to the temple of Brahmā (cat. 59). Together with Brahmā, Viṣṇu was venerated in a stela of king Bhadravarman/Phạm Hồ Đạt erected in Mỹ Sơn in the late 4th-early 5th century. Viṣṇu appears more than Brahmā in Cham art (Finot 1901: 18). He was represented in bas-reliefs and also in-the-round statues as the main icons of the temples. One of the earliest images of Viṣṇu in Cham sculpture appeared in the mid-8th century in the well-known pediment of Mỹ Sơn E1 temple as Viṣṇu Anantaśāyin lying on a seven-headed serpent Śeṣa or Ananta when Brahmā was born in a lotus blossom sprouting from Viṣṇu's navel (cat. 10). In another case, Viṣṇu was worshipped as Nārāyaṇa on the riverbank of the Thu Bồn or *Mahānadi*, the mother river, which together with Mỹ Sơn or *Mahāparvata* the father mountain, create the sacred space of this land. (Trần Kỳ Phương et al. 2015: 440)

In the Amarāvati polity of Champa (now Quảng Nam province today), Mỹ Sơn was

constructed as a royal sanctuary in veneration of Śiva-Śrīśānabhadreśvara. Other religious sites such as Trà Kiệu and Khương Mỹ were probably dedicated to Viṣṇu, as representations of many Vaiṣṇava scenes were discovered there, including bas-reliefs of the *Rāmāyaṇa* epic, a Kṛṣṇa-Govardhana tympanum, Viṣṇu-Garuda and other Vaiṣṇava statuary.

In this tympanum, Viṣṇu is seated cross-legged in half-lotus posture (*paryāṅkāśana*) on a large lotus blossom pedestal. He holds the discus (*cakra*), the conch (*śaṅkha*), the mace (*gada*), and a clod of earth (*logah*). He wears a tiered crown (*kirītamukuta*) with bold lotus petals, his earrings are threaded rings, his necklace composed by a chain of round beads, his armbands are made of large triangular petals in double layer, and the simple treatment of his *sampot* are all typical of Cham sculptural features during the 11th-12th centuries (Tingley 2009: 244, cat. 68). The large triangular tympanum frame and the lotus base are unusual.

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