

When the Tháp Mẫm site containing many tons of sculptures was discovered in 1934 a magnificent four-armed but headless work emerged which wore a serpentine sacred thread (*nāgayajñopavīta*) typical of the supreme Brahmanical deity Śiva. This magnificent image is closely related to a more complete Śiva made perhaps a century earlier and found in 1885 by Eugène Navalle, a French resident of Quy Nhơn (province of Bình Định) not far from the Bánh Ít ('Silver Towers, fig. 1). These masterworks of exceptional quality have finely chiselled, erect torsos, legs folded upon each other (*sattvaparyānkāsana*) with only the toes visible under an elaborately worked fold of the sampot that falls forward with emphasis onto the lotus base. The image now in the musée Guimet (MG 18130) has 10 sadly fragmented arms held up in a circle, whereas the head of exceptional power is almost perfectly preserved. The Bánh Ít Śiva appears to have established a model of perfection for the form of the supreme Brahmanical deity that was being closely followed many decades later for the great Tháp Mẫm complex. The quality of the 11<sup>th</sup> century masterpiece did not escape the attention of the colonial administrator who, faced with the state of total abandon of the monument it was found near to, decided to send it to Paris, to the Louvre museum. Cham sculptures that left the Indochinese peninsula before the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century are rare and this was one of them. As it did not integrate easily there into a collection with very few pieces from Southeast Asia, it was to quickly join the Trocadero Indochina museum administered by Louis Delaporte (1842-1925), where greater justice was accorded this great masterwork.<sup>1</sup>

On both figures a flat belt supports garlands of stylized pearls lying on the loin cloth in a manner descended from Trà Kiệu. With the exception of the bracelets (*kaṅkana*), the armbands (*keyūra*), the upper armbands (*aṅgada*) and the stomacher (*udarabandha*) are also embellished with a double jewel (for the arm ornaments) and quadri-fold for the pectoral belt. The necklace (*hāra*) on the Guimet icon is comparatively sober and unites simple pearls of different sizes, as in the diadem (*kirita*). The ear pendants are difficult to see but have an animal head that could be a lion but more probably that of a serpent (*nāga*). The Brahmanical cord of both image may be compared with that on the torso of the *dvārapāla* of Đồng Dương. Jean Boisselier



Fig. 1 11<sup>th</sup> century Tháp Bánh Ít ('silver towers') in the Musée Guimet (MG 18130). (Courtesy Photographic Archives, Musée national des arts asiatiques-Guimet, Paris)

saw a chignon cover in the high conical coiffure with a crescent moon, as the mark of Śiva. The presence of a third eye on the forehead is also a distinctive sign of Śiva.

One can only deplore the fragmentary character of both works. Stylistically they have been aligned with the atelier of Chánh Lộ and both would have been major figureheads of the sacred images of Champa starting from the 11<sup>th</sup> century. They have been compared with the divinity of Linh Thái, perhaps contemporary with or a little later (?)<sup>2</sup> than the Śiva (?) of Tháp Mẫm which evidently was inspired directly by this piece though in a somewhat different aesthetic.<sup>3</sup> The Cham sculptors, neglecting the in the round for high relief, would from now on abandon standing anthropomorphic figures, with the exception of *dvārapāla*. Leaning on the back-slab, the divine image would press further back to the point of fusion, when Cham art would nevertheless manifest for a last time its inventive spirit. The Śiva of the Silver Towers is unaware of such upheavals and nothing seems capable of perturbing his young and timeless majesty.

PB/PDS

- 1 The precise dates when it was sent to France are not known. According to Charles Lemire (Lemire 1889 (2), p. 214), 'The last statue the vault housed was transported to France in 1886.' This date would correspond fairly well with Eugène Navalle's stay in Quy Nhơn in 1885, according to Louis Malleret (Malleret 1956, p. 212, note 1). We have not found the date of this transfer in the incomplete archives of the Trocadero Indochina museum. There is also no further precision in Dupont 1934, pp. 145-147.
- 2 Parmentier 1909 (1), p. 509, fig. 118.
- 3 Ducrest and Vandermeersch 1997, no. 137, pp. 150-151.