

87. *Kinnarī*

Tháp Mâm, Bình Định

12th-13th centuries

Sandstone: H. 45 cm;

W. 15 cm; D. 36 cm

BTC 262-32.35



This is a rare *kinnarī* figure (half female-half bird) in Cham art designed as a decorative corner piece, or accent piece, for the roof angles of a tower with a rectangular tenon (Boisselier 1963: 273). With arms raised in flight and with back arched, she would have appeared to be lifting the roof. The wings are rich and stylized and her feathered plumage emerges below a narrow belt composed of a chain of pearls which also appears in armband and bracelet.

The use of bird-like figures such as *garuḍas*, *kinnaras* and *kinnarīs* for the corner pieces of towers appeared first in the 12th century in the architecture of the Vijaya polity, Bình Định province today (Stern 1942: 39-0, Pl. 7).¹ They appeared as part of a new trend in decorative features of Cham temples in the Vijaya polity when it developed cultural exchanges with Angkor. (Roveda 2005: 204)

Kinnarīs and *kinnaras* mythical celestial singers and dancers are common to many ancient cultures in Southeast Asia and appear in Brahmanical and Buddhist temples. *Kinnarīs*

have the head, torso and arms of a woman and the wings, tail and feet of a bird. They are distinguished for her dance, song and poetry as well as their beauty, grace and accomplishment. They had an important matrilineal role in Javanese narratives and were commonly used as support figurines in later Khmer and Thai temples.

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1 On the temple-towers of the 10th-12th century Amarāvati polity (Quảng Nam province today) during the 10th to 12th centuries the corner pieces formed only the figures of sea-monsters (*makaras*), serpents (*nāgas*), heavenly dancers (*apsaras*) or flame-shaped flora.