

88, 89, 90. Adorned Ascetics

Tháp Mãm, Binh Định

12th-13th centuries (?)

Sandstone: H. 55 cm; W. 45 cm; D. 20 cm

BTC 252-44.263; BTC 261-44.264;

BTC 260-44.266



The Śaiva ascetic tradition of the multi-talented Pāśupata sect, already known in 7th century inscriptions in pre-Angkorian Cambodia, is traced to early Champa for the first time here (see Part I section 5 'Pāśupata sect in Ancient Cambodia and Champa').

Although they belong to an iconographic style well attested in the Cham monuments in the Tháp Mãm style, in which a Khmer influence may be discerned, these small, seated figures with legs folded under the body in a set and schematic attitude remain indefinable. The position of the legs, the presence of the rosary, the gesture of the hands, the face marked with a beard invites the identification of a Śaiva ascetic (*ṛṣi*) like those that abound in the Khmer art styles of Angkor Wat and the Bayon (12th-13th centuries).

However, the somewhat elaborate costume, with a centre fold falling over the feet, and even more the jewelry (bracelets, armbands, earrings) and the cylindrical mitre encircled with pearls departs from the ascetic iconography of completely naked figures.

In 1889, Charles Lemire wrote of the Thủ Thiện tower: 'I salvaged from the destruction two statues of Brahma [sic] with tiara, a beard

of the Hindu type; but such individuals always have the nose and often the ears mutilated.'¹ A small pediment, brought to France with the sculptures of Charles Lemire, was acquired by the musée Guimet in 1895, at the sale of his collection, while a second example, identical in all details if perhaps better preserved, would join the Asiatic collections of the museum of Berlin.² It could be objected that the provenance of this piece, as may one day be confirmed, is a poor fit with a Śaiva image, the Thủ Thiện sanctuary being considered with good reason to be Buddhist. But then the Jayavarman VII temples in Angkor were all pre-eminently, though never exclusively Buddhist. Jean Boisselier in the past noted the similitude of these ascetics with certain contemporary Khmer traditions and saw in this case something specific to Champa, behind which some sectarian tradition was perhaps hidden.³ Without doubt these religious or 'holy persons' appear to echo specifically Cham traditions.

1 Lemire 1889 (2), p. 221.

2 See Isabelle Riblet, 'À propos de deux sculptures chames du musée Guimet', *Lettre de la SACHA*, no. 3, June 1998, p. 5-6.

3 Boisselier 1963 (1), pp. 274-275 and fig. 183.