



# Vibrancy in Stone

Masterpieces  
of the Đà Nẵng  
Museum of  
Cham Sculpture

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Võ Văn Thắng  
Peter D. Sharrock

Photographs by Paisarn Piemmettawat



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Editors: Trần Kỳ Phương, Võ Văn Thắng, Peter D. Sharrock  
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First published in Thailand in 2018 by  
River Books Co., Ltd  
396 Maharaj Road, Tatien,  
Bangkok 10200 Thailand  
Tel: (66) 2 225-4963, 2 225-0139, 2 622-1900  
Fax: (66) 2 225-3861  
Email: order@riverbooksbk.com  
www.riverbooksbk.com

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permission of the publisher.

Publisher: Narisa Chakrabongse  
Production Supervisor: Paisarn Piemmettawat  
Design: Ruetairat Nanta

ISBN 978 616 7339 99 3

Cover: Detail of the Dancing Shiva from Phong Lệ, Đà Nẵng (see page 210).  
Back cover: Polo players from Thạch Hãn, Quảng Trị (see page 206).

Printed and bound in Thailand by Sirivatana Interprint Public Co., Ltd.

# 12 CHAMPA ARCHAEOLOGY IN VIETNAM FROM 1975

LÂM THỊ MỸ DUNG

Archaeological remains of the culture of Champa were first uncovered in the late 19th century and first studied by French scholars in the early 20th century. Their achievements in the fields of epigraphy, religion and art were remarkable, although there were limitations in the collecting and interpretation of data – due in part to their point of view and also to their methods and techniques of data collection and interpretation. It can be said today that the colonial period research on Champa remains a substantial body of research that invites further research.

Since the reunification of Vietnam in 1975, Champa archaeological research has been promoted in many fields and has been conducted mainly by Vietnamese scholars. However, it can be said that during the first decade of the post-war period, such study was almost forgotten for many reasons, both subjective and objective. Until 1985, only small-scale surveys were conducted by the archaeologists from National University, Hà Nội, and research areas and subjects were very limited. Until recently we had little idea about the living conditions, handicrafts and the economic structure of Champa.

Since the 1990s, Champa research has reached a new level. Building on the achievements of the earlier generations of scholars, those who have studied during this period have stepped up, supplemented and perfected the results in the fields that have been carried out in the past such as architecture, sculpture, and epigraphy and so on. They have also developed from an archaeological perspective, with surveys for discovering new sites and excavations at extant sites, including citadel complexes, trading ports and temple-towers. In their fieldwork, scholars have also focused more attention on handicrafts, including the production of ceramic types and jewelry as well as water management techniques, irrigation, agriculture, and aspects of religious life and long-distance trade.

Although research on architectural and sculptural issues has been limited, excavations

and restoration of temple towers, have brought new knowledge on spatial structure, foundation building and the evolution of architectural art styles and their chronology, as well as on construction technology and materials. New artifacts such as architectural elements, stone sculptures, pottery and jewelry have emerged from recent field work and have considerably enriched the Champa data. According to the statistics, more than 200 Champa sites were listed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. By the end of that century, more than 300 sites had been recognized and mapped.

Many sites were excavated on a large scale over many years by Vietnamese archaeologists, who were sometimes supported by scholars from Japan, Germany, Italy, Poland and England. The research raised questions about the origin of these sites and their relationships with the Chinese and Indian worlds. The long-term research programs included those listed below.

- An archaeological survey and study program, sponsored by Toyota, at the ancient river port of Hội An and its surrounding, by the University of Hà Nội, and the Centre for Management and Conservation of Hội An Monuments.
- An excavation at Trà Kiệu conducted by archaeologists from the Hanoi National University and Institute of Archaeology, Hanoi, associated with the team from London University and Dr. Mariko Yamagata.
- A research program at Cổ Luỹ Phú Thọ citadel led by the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Hà Nội National University, and Quảng Ngãi Provincial Museum.
- The Cù Lao Chàm (Cham Islands) research program also led by University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Hanoi National University with the Centre for Management and Conservation of Hội An Monuments.

- The excavation of Sa Huỳnh and post Sa Huỳnh cultural remains in Duy Xuyên and Điện Bàn districts (Quảng Nam province) by University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Hanoi National University and the Institute of Archaeology of Comparative and Common studies, Federal Republic of Germany.
- A research program on ancient ports and shipwrecks in Central Vietnam, conducted by a team from the Institute of Archaeology, Hà Nội.
- A research program on archaeological relics on Lý Sơn Island, Quảng Ngãi province by the Institute of Archaeology, Hà Nội and Quảng Ngãi provincial Museum.
- The research program at Hồ Citadel by Hà Nội National University, the Phú Yên Museum, the Institute of Archaeology, Hà Nội and the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, of Hồ Chí Minh City National University.
- A research program on 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> century glazed Gò Sành ceramics in the 1990s by the Institute of Archaeology, Hà Nội, the Bình Định Museum and by Japanese researchers.
- A study of unglazed pottery wares discovered in Champa sites dating to the first millennium CE, led by a team of the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Hanoi National University.
- An excavation and comparative study program from 2015 to the present of the Cha or Tra Citadel and other Champa citadels, conducted of the Centre for Study of the Citadel, the Academy of Social Sciences and Humanities of Vietnam and the Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism of Bình Định province.
- The Research and excavation program from 2007 to 2012 of the Hóa Châu citadel by the Huế University of Science and University and Kansai University, Japan.
- A research program on Lôi citadel done by the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Hà Nội National University and Huế University of Sciences in time from 2014 to 2016.

Along with these programs, many research projects have been conducted by National and Provincial Museums with the aim of collecting new materials for exhibition and to assess the present condition of the Champa monuments and to map the Champa sites.

For the restoration, conservation and promotion of the Champa towers, new types of archaeological excavations have been deployed in recent years. The monuments are excavated by Vietnamese and foreign archaeologists and restoration specialists from various agencies. So far teams from Poland and Italy have worked with Vietnam's Design and Preservation Centre and the Institute of Building Technology.

### State structures

Many temple-tower complexes have been restored totally or partly as at Mỹ Sơn, Khương Mỹ, Chiền Đàn, Bánh Ít, Dương Long, Tháp Đồi, Cánh Tiên, Bình Lâm, Tháp Nhạn, Po Nagar, Hòa Lai, Phố Hải. During these works accurate research to select appropriate restoration methods and techniques contributed to improving our knowledge of the old construction techniques, building materials, art styles and architectural model.

All these research efforts have tended to consolidate the view of most Vietnamese, French and other scholars that Champa was a federation of small kingdoms or polities linked in a *mandala* or archipelago model. Among the first scholars to form this view were O.W. Wolters, K. Taylor and Trần Quốc Vương, who departed from the idea of a unified state assumed by H. Maspero in *Le Royaume de Champa*. Professor Trần Quốc Vương and Trần Kỳ Phương defined a model of the formation and development of small Champa formations along rivers flowing from the mountains to the sea. Each polity was set on a holy mountain and a holy river. Along the river, each state established three major centres – a religious sanctuary, a political centre or royal city and a trading port on an estuary.

### Criteria for classifying Champa ceramics.

Archaeologists at the National University of Hà Nội and the Institute of Archaeology, with the cooperation of British and Japanese scholars, have made important contributions. From excavations of citadels, temples, harbors and kilns from 2nd century BCE to the 10<sup>th</sup> century two unglazed ceramic types of ware were identified.

First, unglazed coarse ceramics for daily use and tools for craft production, made with open air firing, show some evidence of inheritance from the earlier Sa Huỳnh culture, but with many changes in the processing technique and decoration. Second, unglazed fine ceramics with great variety of the types, including domestic wares, table wares, ritual wares, votive tablets, building materials, architectural decorative elements and sculpture. The fine ceramics were fired in kilns and production was organized for both household production and state production. Transfers in technique came from China, Red River Delta and India to meet the needs of new social orders and the needs arising from new thought and new religion.

Regarding the glazed ceramics which were fired in specific kilns, commonly known as Gò Sành or Bình Định pottery, the research led by the Institute of Archaeology in association with Japanese experts has clarified that Gò Sành ceramics were produced during the 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries as the trade items. It is worth noting that Gò Sành potsherds have appeared on the international ceramics market from the excavation of shipwrecks and other sites in Southeast Asia, Egypt and beyond. Some doctoral theses and monographs on these pottery series have already been published.

### Criteria for classifying Champa wells and hydraulic systems

The discovery in 1984 of ancient wells around the area of the temple-towers of Khương Mỹ (Tam Kỳ, Quảng Nam) and a series of related discoveries in other areas have enabled Vietnamese archaeologists to identify characteristic Champa well construction, building materials, shape variations and water detectors.

The research of M. Colani and other scholars has been used in new excavations and comparative water systems studies in Gio Linh, Quảng Trị province and Quảng Nam province. This has shown that the inhabitants of Champa developed appropriate ecological adaptation strategies for the terrain, climate and weather conditions of modern Central Vietnam. Later Vietnamese and Chinese residents continued to use and repair these wells and related hydraulic systems, as well as to build new ones for new water resources. This re-use and acquisition of earlier technology delayed attribution of these water systems and technologies to their original inventors.

### The building of Champa citadels

Early studies of the relationships between Champa and Đại Việt recorded the ancient citadels from annals, ethnographic comparisons and narrative stories. This has now been modified through studying building techniques, structures and dates of building and re-building. From the 1980s, excavations and surveys of Champa citadels from Quảng Bình to Khánh Hòa provinces has helped solving some of the questions about construction techniques and the historical role and dates of these citadels, as well as their use and reuse. In general, the Champa citadel complexes are usually built on river banks – mainly on south banks – and bear many similarities with Chinese citadel construction techniques. The earliest complexes were built around the 4<sup>th</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> centuries, such as at Thành Lôi in Huế city, Trà Kiệu citadel in Quảng Nam province, Cổ Lũy citadel in Quảng Ngãi province, Chà citadel in Bình Định province and Hồ citadel in Phú Yên province. Some of the structures were repaired several times. Some Champa citadels were later re-used by Vietnamese people, such as at Thuận Châu in Quảng Trị province and Hóa Châu citadel in Huế City.

### Economic structures and the role of the riverine and maritime trade.

The people of Champa developed diverse and dynamic economic structures to exploit natural resources via trade links. Archaeological findings of rice traces, agricultural tools and sophisticated irrigation systems, combined with a catalogue of tribute items illuminate a three-fold economic structure that (i) exploited forest and marine resources, (ii) agricultural production and (iii) handicrafts production for trade over land, river and sea. The important position of Champa in the international trade network was initially determined from research of foreign products discovered from Han China, Central Asia and India. This was confirmed by the discovery of vestiges of coastal and island ports and river landings.

### Architectural models of temple – tower complexes.

Champa architectural concepts were strongly influenced by Indian cosmology. The temple-tower complex formation included a sanctuary *kalan*, encircled by small temple-towers, ancillary buildings and a surrounding wall. Influenced by

the Indian *sikhara*, the Champa *kalan* is a temple dedicated to the sacred image or *yoni-linga* housed in the sanctum sanctorum, a narrow square room with a pyramidal roof. Japanese architect Shigeeda Yukata has classified Champa constructions into six evolved groups.

### **Indigenous resources were fundamental to the formation of Champa, the relationships between Sa Huỳnh – Linyi – Champa.**

New excavations have led archaeologists to affirm that indigenous cultural resources – from Sa Huỳnh communities, as well as Đông Sơn culture – made fundamental to the formation of Champa while exogenous factors played a catalytic role.

### **Publications**

More than 400 articles have been published in scientific journals and specialized research journals such as *Archaeology*, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, *Journal of Science*, VNU from Hà Nội and Hồ Chí Minh City. There are more than a dozen monographs and conference proceedings, not to mention a large number of excavation and survey reports, which are kept in the Archives of the Museum of Anthropology, the History Faculty, the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, the National Universities of Hà Nội and Hồ Chí Minh City, the Library of the Institute of Archaeology, the National History Museum, the Institute of Sustainable Development of Southern Vietnam and other specialized agencies. Several doctoral dissertations on Champa archaeology have been successfully defended.

The collaboration of international experts in recent years has contributed new insights into Champa culture and history. A number of works published in English and French by Vietnamese and foreign scholars research state formation, the rise of social complexity, the role of exogenous factors in changing the political structure of Southeast Asia in the early centuries BCE. These works include papers on the ‘Sinization’ and ‘Indianization’ processes in Southeast Asia. Research on island Southeast Asia has contributed important data with bearing on the historical, cultural, economic, commercial, political and religious issues of Champa in the first millennium CE and later centuries.

### **Exhibitions**

Artifacts related to Champa’s history and civilization are displayed and stored in some National Museums. The largest and most complete collection is in the Museum of Cham Sculpture in Đà Nẵng City. At the provincial museums of Central Vietnam from Quảng Trị to Bình Thuận provinces, there are the displays of Champa art, sculpture and other artifacts. In recent years, a number of district-level museums have been established which dedicate displays to the ancient culture of the region. The best collection of ceramics and every day artifacts is stored in Sa Huỳnh Culture and Champa Museum in Duy Xuyên District. There are also the Trade Ceramics Museum and the Sa Huỳnh Museum in Hội An. Prominent Champa exhibitions have been organized abroad in France and the United States, and a number of Champa artifacts will shortly be displayed in Germany.

### **Challenges and difficulties**

There is a shortage of qualified, highly skilled research staff, especially among young researchers. Papers are published in international scientific journals, but there is no close link between the researchers who write them. There is as yet no long-term, systematic research strategy based on evaluating the results of excavations and there is a shortage of funds for research, preservation and display. This results in part from the current rapid industrialization and modernization of the country.

An illegal trade in Champa antiques and the production of fake Champa antiques have increased in recent years, but no effective methods have been put in place to prevent this. Finally, there is a big gap between the resources poured into tourism expansion and the resource going into preservation of the Champa heritage.