

# Mỹ Sơn Sanctuary

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The Mỹ Sơn sanctuary (4th- 13th centuries CE) is a sacred archaeological site in Champa, where the Chams once built more than seventy sacred Hindu temples. The Chams, who once dominated the region of Southern Vietnam are an ethnic group with historical records dating from the 4th century and they created some of the most exquisite Hindu art and architecture found in Southeast Asia.



Date Range: 500 CE - 1400 CE

Region: Mỹ Sơn, Vietnam

Region tags: Vietnam, Southeast Asia, Mỹ Sơn

Attached maps include Champa in 4th - 13th century. The polygon is the approximate location of the Mỹ Sơn Sanctuary itself.

## Status of Participants:

✓ Elite    ✓ Religious Specialists

## General Variables

### Sources and Excavations

#### Print Sources

Print sources used for understanding this subject:

- Source 1: Trần Kỳ Phương. Vestiges of Champa Civilization. Hà Nội : Thế Giới Publishers, 2012.
- Source 2: Trần Kỳ Phương & Rie Nakamura, "My Son and Po Nagar Nha Trang Sanctuaries: in regard to the cosmological dualist cult of Champa kingdom (Central Vietnam)." Old Myths and New Approaches – Interpreting Ancient Religious Sites in Southeast Asia. Ed. Alexandre Haende, Monash Asia Institute, Monash University, 2012, 267-280
- Source 3: Trần Kỳ Phương. Mỹ Sơn Trong Lịch Sử Nghệ Thuật Chăm. Đà Nẵng: Nhà xuất bản Đà Nẵng, 1988.

#### Online Sources

Online sources used for understanding this subject:

- Source 1 URL: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/949/>
- Source 1 Description: UNESCO website for Mỹ Sơn Sanctuary
- Source 2 URL: <https://asia.si.edu/mountains-museums-and-the-mekong-delta-travels-in-vietnam-july-2019/>
- Source 2 Description: Mountains, Museums, and the Mekong Delta: Travels in Vietnam By Emma

Natalya Stein

– Source 3 URL: <https://isaw.nyu.edu/publications/inscriptions/campa/>

– Source 3 Description: Corpus of the Inscriptions of Campā

Has this place been the focus of excavation (pre-modern, illicit, or scientific):

Answer 'Yes' for each period or type of excavation.

– Yes



Type of excavation:

– Scientific



Years of excavation:

– Year range: 1889



Name of excavation

– Official or descriptive name: French survey of the Mỹ Sơn Sanctuary beginning in 1889

## Topographical Context

Is the place associated with a feature in the landscape

– Elevation



Type of elevation

– Hill

– Mountain

Does the place involve human-made features besides structure:

Other features might be ground clearing, terracing, other modifications of the local environment.

– Yes



Type of feature

– Mound

– Leveling of ground

– Terracing

– Clearing

– Trackway or road-surface

- Water feature
- Plantings

Is the place situated in an urban or significantly urbanized area:

- No

Is the place situated in a rural setting:

- Yes

↳ Are there settlements in close proximity to the place:  
– Yes

↳ Are there routes of travel in close proximity to the place:  
– Yes

Is the place situated far removed from non-religious places of habitation:

- Yes

↳ Is there an established route of travel connecting it to a wider transportation network:  
– Yes

## Structures Present

Are there structures or features present:

Instructions: Answer once for each structure/feature or group that can be differentiated.

- Yes

↳ A single structure  
– Yes

↳ The structure has a definite shape  
– Rectangular

↳ One single feature  
– Clearing

↳ A group of structures:

– Yes

↳ Are they part of a single design/construction stage:

– Yes

↳ A group of features:

– Yes

↳ Are they part of a single design/construction stage:

– No

↳ Is it part of a larger place/sanctuary:

– Yes

Notes: Ten monumental structures of the seventy-one temples are extant at the Mỹ Sơn complex.

↳ What is the function of the structure/feature or group:

Answer "Yes" once for each distinct function

– Worship

Notes: Worship of deity, Shiva

↳ Worship:

– Communal

↳ Is the structure/feature finished:

– Yes

↳ Was the structure/feature intended to last beyond a generation:

– Yes

↳ Was the structure/feature modified through time:

– Yes

↳ Was the structure/feature destroyed:

– No

↳ Has the structure/feature been reconstructed:

– Yes

↳ In antiquity

– Periodically

↳ In modernity

– Post-Renaissance

### Reasons for Creation/Construction/Consecration

Is the place used for the worship of/communication with non-human supernatural beings:

– Yes

↳ Dedicated to a supernatural being:

– Yes [specify]: Shiva

↳ Dedicated to more than one supernatural being:

– Yes [specify]: Hindu gods

Is the place used for the worship of a semi-divine human being:

– Yes

↳ Is it a cenotaph:

– No

↳ Does it commemorate a family/clan/group:

– No

Is the place used for the worship of non-divine ancestors:

– Yes

↳ Is it a cenotaph:

– No

↳ Does it commemorate a family/clan/group:

– No

Was the place commissioned/built by an official political entity:

A political entity is a local power structure that leverages a workforce.

– Yes



Specify

– King or emperor

– Religious specialists affiliated with political entity

Were the Structures built by specific groups of people:

– Yes



Groups:

– Priests

– Specialized labourers/craftspeople

Was the place thought to have originated as the result of divine intervention:

– Yes



Specify

– Revealed by high god

Was the place created to mark or commemorate the birthplace of a supernatural or human being:

– No

Was the place created as the result of an event:

– No

Was the creation of the place sponsored by an external financial/material donation:

– Yes



Is this sponsor of the same religious group/tradition as the main usage of the place:

– Yes

Was the establishment of the place motivated by:

– Thanksgiving to a god/gods for favor received

Was the place built specifically for housing scriptures/sacred texts:

– No

## Design and Material Remains

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### Overall Structure

Is the place made up of multiple built structures:

– Yes

↳ Are any of the structures attached to or associated with a landscape feature:

– Yes

↳ Are any of the structures attached to other structures:

– Yes

↳ Is there a hierarchy among the structures:

– Yes

Is monumental architecture present:

Monumental architecture is defined here as a built structure that surpasses average human proportions and in general is larger and more complex than is necessary to fulfill the structure's utilitarian function(s). Examples of monumental architecture include Mesopotamian Ziggurats, Egyptian Pyramids, Greek and Roman temples, Mesoamerican Pyramids, North American and Aegean burial mounds, etc.

– Yes

↳ In the average place, what percentage of area is taken up by built monuments:

– Percentage: 80

↳ Footprint of largest single religious monument, square meters:

Please add dimensions in the comments, if known.

– Square meters: 2.7

Notes: The Mỹ Sơn E 1 pedestal is 2.7 meters. The area is 142 hectares.

↳ Height of largest single religious monument, meters:

– Height, meters: 3.5

↳ Size of average monument, square meters:

– Square meters: 2.7

↳ Height of average monument, meters:

– Height, meters: 3.5

Is the structure/feature made out of natural materials:

Answer [Yes] for each material type

– Yes

↳ Earth

– Yes

↳ Is this material sourced locally:

– Yes

↳ Is this material lacking in the local natural environment:

– No

↳ Sand

– Yes

↳ Is this material sourced locally:

– Yes

↳ Is this material lacking in the local natural environment:

– No

↳ Clay

– Yes

↳ Is this material sourced locally:

– Yes



↳ Is this material lacking in the local natural environment:  
– No

↳ Plaster  
– Yes

↳ Is this material sourced locally:  
– Yes

↳ Is this material lacking in the local natural environment:  
– No

↳ Wood  
– Yes

↳ Is this material sourced locally:  
– Yes

↳ Is this material lacking in the local natural environment:  
– No

↳ Grass  
– Yes

↳ Is this material sourced locally:  
– Yes

↳ Is this material lacking in the local natural environment:  
– No

↳ Stone  
– Yes

↳ Is this material sourced locally:  
– Yes

↳ Is this material lacking in the local natural environment:

– No

↳ Other

–Other [specify]: Brick

Notes: The temples of the Mỹ Sơn sanctuary are constructed of fired brick and sandstone. There are few scientific studies on the specific types of brick and sandstone, and have similarities to construction materials from neighboring Cambodia.

Is the structure/feature made out of human-made materials

– No

## Decoration

Is decoration present:

– Yes

↳ Is decoration part of the building (permanent):

– Yes

↳ On the outside:

– Yes

↳ On the inside:

– Yes

↳ Is decoration attached to the building, i.e. movable reliefs or tapestries

– No

↳ Is the decoration figural:

A figural representation is defined here as one that contains the depiction of discernible human, anthropomorphic, animal, or zoomorphic forms. In general, it differentiates between animate and inanimate beings, as well as between narrative compositions and still life, landscapes, abstraction, etc. Answer [Yes] for each type of figure depicted

– Yes

↳ Are there gods depicted:

– Yes

- ↳ Are there other supernatural beings depicted:
  - Yes
  
- ↳ Are there humans depicted:
  - Yes
  
- ↳ Are there animals depicted:
  - Yes
  
- ↳ Are there animal-human hybrids depicted:
  - Yes
  
- ↳ Is the decoration non-figural:
  - Yes
  
  - ↳ Is it geometric/abstract
    - Yes
  
  - ↳ Floral motifs
    - Yes
  
  - ↳ Is it writing/caligraphy
    - No
  
  - ↳ Other [Specify]
    - Other [specify]: Animals
  
- ↳ Is the decoration hidden or restricted from view:
  - Yes
  
  - ↳ Can the decoration be revealed:
    - Yes
  
- ↳ Are there statues present:
  - Yes

↳ Cult statues:

– Yes

↳ Statues of gods/supernatural beings:

– Yes

↳ Statues of humans:

– Yes

↳ Other [Specify]

–Other [specify]: Each tower-temple forms a rectangular cell, with an altar-pedestal at the center of the sacred architecture. There also statues of vehicles (animals).

↳ Are there reliefs present:

A relief as opposed to sculpture carved on the round is a work of sculpture in which the figures project from a background support, generally a flat surface. Reliefs can be carved out of stone, clay, or a similar material.

– Yes

↳ Reliefs representing the god(s) worshipped at the place:

– Yes

↳ Reliefs representing mythological narratives:

– Yes

↳ Reliefs representing human/historical narratives:

– Yes

↳ Other [Specify]

–Other [specify]: Reliefs representing animals

↳ Are there paintings present:

– No

↳ Are there mosaics present:

– No

- ↳ Are there inscriptions as part of the decoration:
  - Yes
    - ↳ Are the inscriptions ornamental:
      - No
    - ↳ Are the inscriptions informative/declarative [e.g. historical narratives, calendars, donor lists etc...]
      - Yes
    - ↳ Are the inscription a formal dedication:
      - Yes
    - ↳ Other [Specify]
      - Other [specify]: Free standing steles of inscriptions
- ↳ Other type of decoration:
  - Yes [specify]: Cham inscriptions

## Iconography

Are there distinct features in the places iconography:

– Yes

- ↳ Eyes (stylized or not)
  - Yes

- ↳ Supernatural beings (zoomorphic)
  - Yes

Notes: Supernatural beings are sometimes riding on vehicles (animals). The zoomorphic vehicles also represent the deity.

- ↳ Supernatural beings (geomorphic)
  - Yes

- ↳ Supernatural beings (anthropomorphic)
  - Yes

Notes: Mỹ Sơn is dedicated to the deity Shiva, represented in the human form. Other Hindu deities such as Brahma, Ganesha, and Vishnu are also represented at the site.

↳ Supernatural beings (abstract)

– Yes

Notes: Shiva is also represented in the form of a linga.

↳ Portrayals of afterlife

– No

↳ Aspects of doctrine (e.g. cross, trinity, Mithraic symbols)

– No

↳ Humans

– Yes

Notes: Brahmins, ascetic, and worshippers.

↳ Supernatural narratives

– Yes

↳ Human narratives

– Yes

↳ Other [Specify]

–Other [specify]: Animals

## Beliefs and Practices

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### Funerary Associations

Is this place a tomb/burial:

– No

Is this a place for the worship of the dead:

– No

Is this a place for treatment of the corpse:

– No

Are co-sacrifices present in tomb/burial:

Co-sacrifices are animal/human sacrifices prompted by the death of the primary occupant of the tomb/burial.

– No

Are grave goods present:

– No

Are formal burials present:

– No

## Supernatural Beings

Is a supreme high god is present:

– Yes

↳ Are they anthropomorphic:

– Yes

↳ Are they sky deity:

– Yes

↳ Are they chthonic (underworld)

– Yes

↳ Are they fused with king/kingship role (king = high god)

– Yes

↳ Are they the monarch is seen as a manifestation or emanation of the high god:

– Yes

↳ Are they kin relation to elites:

– Yes

↳ Are they other type of loyalty or connection to elites:

– Yes

↳ Are they unquestionably good:

– Yes

↳ Are they other:

–Other [specify]: Gender specific. In the north, Mỹ Sơn temples honor the deity, Shiva and the male realm.

Does the supreme high god communicate with the living at this place:

– Yes

↳ In waking, everyday life:

– Yes

↳ In dreams:

– Yes

↳ In trance possession:

– Yes

↳ Through divination practices:

– Yes

↳ Only through religious specialists:

– Yes

↳ Only through monarch:

– Yes

↳ Other

–Other [specify]: medicinal herbs

Are previously human spirits present:

– Yes



↳ Human spirits can be seen:  
– Yes

↳ Human spirits can be physically felt:  
– Yes

Do human spirits communicate with the living at this place:  
– Yes

↳ In waking, everyday life:  
– Yes

↳ In dreams:  
– Yes

↳ In trance possession:  
– Yes

↳ Through divination practices:  
– Yes

↳ Only through religious specialists:  
– Yes

↳ Only through monarch:  
– Yes

↳ Other  
– Other [specify]: medicinal herbs

Are nonhuman supernatural beings present:  
– Yes

↳ Human spirits can be seen:  
– Yes

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↳ Human spirits can be physically felt:

– Yes

Do nonhuman spirits communicate with the living at this place:

– Yes

↳ In waking, everyday life:

– Yes

↳ In dreams:

– Yes

↳ In trance possession:

– Yes

↳ Through divination practices:

– Yes

↳ Only through religious specialists:

– Yes

↳ Only through monarch:

– Yes

↳ Other

–Other [specify]: medicinal herbs

Are mixed human-divine beings present:

– Yes

↳ Mixed human-divine spirits can be seen:

– Yes

↳ Mixed human-divine spirits can be physically felt:

– Yes

Do mixed human-divine beings communicate with the living at this place:

– Yes

↳ In waking, everyday life:

– Yes

↳ In dreams:

– Yes

↳ In trance possession:

– Yes

↳ Through divination practices:

– Yes

↳ Only through religious specialists:

– Yes

↳ Only through monarch:

– Yes

↳ Other

– Other [specify]: medicinal herbs

Is the supernatural being/high god present in the form of a cult statue(s):

– Yes

↳ Is the cult statue visible:

– Yes

↳ Is the cult statue hidden:

– Yes

## Supernatural Interactions

Is supernatural monitoring present:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural monitoring of norm adherence:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about or expect offerings:

– Yes

↳ Libations:

– Yes [specify]: water, puja

↳ Offerings of food:

– Yes [specify]: fruits, flowers, incense

↳ Animal sacrifice:

– No

↳ Human sacrifice:

– No

↳ Sacred objects:

– Yes [specify]: gold plaques, statues, and other images

↳ Daily life objects:

– Yes [specify]: pottery

↳ Other:

– Other [specify]: incense, perfume, sacred water

↳ Supernatural beings care about sex:

– Yes

↳ Does the worship include sex acts/references:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about or expect proper ritual observance:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about or expect performance of rituals:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about or expect maintenance of the place:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about or expect personal hygiene:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about honoring oaths:

– Yes

↳ Other:

– Other [specify]: image and inscription donations

Do visitors communicate with the gods or supernatural beings:

– Yes

↳ Do visitors communicate with gods:

– Yes

↳ Do visitors communicate with other supernatural beings:

– Yes

## Ritual and Performance

### Sacrifices, Offerings, and Maintenance

Are sacrifices performed at this place:

– No

Are there self-sacrifices present:

– No

Are material offerings present:

– Yes

↳ Are material offerings mandatory:

– Yes

↳ Are material offerings composed of valuable objects:

– Yes

↳ Are material offerings composed of daily-life objects:

– Yes

↳ Are material offerings interred at this place (in caches):

– Yes

↳ Other

– Other [specify]: Gold plaques were placed underneath the temple as consecration objects.

Is attendance to worship/sacrifice mandatory:

– Yes

↳ By all the community

– Yes

↳ By specific individuals

– Yes [specify]: king, priests, brahmins, ascetics

Is maintenance of the place performed:

– Yes

↳ Is it required:

– Yes

↳ Is there cleansing (for the maintenance):

– Yes

↳ Are there periodic repairs/reconstructions:

– Yes

↳ Is the maintenance performed by permanent staff:

– Yes

↳ Other

– Other [specify]: The Mỹ Sơn sanctuary is a UNESCO heritage site since 1999.

## Pilgrimage and Festivals

Are pilgrimages present:

– No

Is this place a venue for feasting:

– No

Are festivals present:

– No

## Divination and Healing

Is divination present:

– Yes

↳ Divination by examination of the exta:

Animals remains, internal organs, answer this question and subsequent question once for each species

– No

↳ Divination through human communication:

– Yes

↳ Is a human being the vehicle for the oracle:

– Yes

↳ Is a human being the interpreter of the oracle:

– Yes

↳ Are the oracle interpreters of a specified sex/gender:  
– Yes

↳ Are the oracle interpreters of a specified ethnicity:  
– Yes

↳ Are the oracle interpreters of a specified class:  
– Yes

↳ Is sex-deprivation required:  
– Yes

↳ Are intoxicants required:  
– Yes

↳ Physical ordeal required:  
– Yes

↳ Divination through animal-behavior:  
– No

↳ Divination through non-living material:  
– Oil  
– Smoke  
– Bones  
– Flame

↳ Other  
– Other [specify]: Divination through living materials

Is healing present/practiced at this place:  
– Yes

↳ Incubation  
– No



↳ Healing magic

– Yes

↳ Cleansing

– Yes

↳ Offerings of models of body parts:

– No

↳ Expiation

– No

↳ Other

– Other [specify]: Divination through living materials. Statues were thought to be "alive" and possess sacred spirits of the divine.

Do rituals occur at this place:

Rituals are visibly enacted behaviors by one or more people for the purposes of religious observance.

– Yes

↳ Do large-scale rituals take place:

– Yes

↳ Do small-scale rituals take place:

– Yes

↳ On average how many participants are present in large-scale rituals:

– specify: 1000

↳ How often do these rituals take place:

– specify: Based on ritual calendar

↳ Are there orthodoxy checks:

– No

↳ Are there orthopraxy checks:

– No

↳ Are there synchronic practices:

– Yes

↳ Are there intoxicants used during the ritual:

– Yes

## Institutions and Scriptures

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### Religious Specialists

Are religious specialists present/in charge of this place:

Religious specialists are individuals whose primary duties within a population group are not concerned with subsistence or craft production but the maintenance of the religious landscape and culture of the group.

– Yes

↳ Present full time

– Yes

↳ Present part time

– No

↳ Are the religious specialists of specific sex/gender:

– Yes

↳ Are the religious specialists of specific ethnicity:

– Yes

↳ Are the religious specialists of specific class/cast:

– Yes

↳ Are religious specialists dedicated to the place for life:

– Yes

↳ Are the religious specialists stratified in a hierarchical system:

– Yes

↳ Is access within the space segregated by this hierarchy:

– Yes

Does this place incorporate a living space for religious specialists:

– Yes

Is this place used for the training of religious specialists:

– Yes

Are there formal institutions for the maintenance of the place:

Institutions that are authorized by the religious community or political leaders

– Yes

## Bureaucracy

Is there a formal bureaucracy present at this place:

A bureaucracy consists of a hierarchical system of accounting and rule maintenance primarily concerned with material wealth.

– Yes

↳ Is a bureaucracy present permanently:  
– Yes

↳ Is a bureaucracy present on a temporary or seasonal basis:  
– No

Does this place control economic resources (land, goods, tools):

– Yes

↳ Is this control the primary supporting income of this place:  
– Yes

↳ Does this place lease out land:  
– No

↳ Does this place lease out tools:  
– No

## Public Works

Does this place serve as a location for services to the community:

– Yes

↳ Public food distribution and/or storage:

– No

↳ Place for civic functions (census, elections, others):

– No

↳ Place for the practice of justice (trials, executions, etc.):

– No

↳ Function for water management:

– Yes

↳ Part of the transportation network:

– Yes

↳ Other

– Other [specify]: House of the gods

## Writing/Scriptures

Is non-religious writing stored at this place:

Economic documents, records etc.

– Yes

Are there scriptures associated with this place:

– Yes

↳ Are they written:

– Yes

↳ Are they written at this place:

– Yes

↳ Are they oral:

– Yes

↳ Is there a story associated with the origin and/or construction of this place:

– Yes

↳ Are there religious specialists in charge of interpreting the scriptures:

– Yes

↳ Are the scriptures part of the building/place:

– No

## Bibliography

### General References

Reference: Peter Sharrock D., Võ Văn Thắng, Trần Kỳ Phương. *Vibrancy in Stone: Masterpieces of the Danang Museum of Cham Sculpture*. River Books, 2018. isbn: 9786167339993.

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