

Recognition of Oc Eo Culture Relic in Thoai Son District an Giang Province, Vietnam

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Abstract

Thoai Son, a rural district in Vietnam's An Giang province, is home to Oc Eo town, the site of two important zones of archaeological relics; the Oc Eo Relic and the Ba The Relic, commonly grouped together as the Oc Eo - Ba The Relic. In addition, the Da Noi Relic is also located in Thoai Son District, where numerous gold items have been found. Excavations and studies conducted on the Oc Eo-Ba The Relic were introduced in the work of Louis Malleret "Archaeology of the Mekong Delta" published in years of 1959, 1960, 1962 and 1963. His work mainly introduced about artifacts, which were bought from the local people and very little about relics as he only excavated some archaeological sites. After 1975, the Oc Eo - Ba The and Da Noi Relic were introduced in the work of Le Xuan Diem and his colleagues "Oc Eo Culture Recent Discoveries" published in 1995. Their work mainly introduced about the relics and artifacts they excavated; however, they did not confirm the functions of the relics clearly or exactly as they claimed Da Noi Relic a tomb, but in fact it used to be a Hindu temple at early stage. Furthermore, the confirmation of the date of relics was only based on C¹⁴ method. Notwithstanding, thanks to Louis Malleret and Le Xuan Diem and his colleagues works and the two relics Go Cay Thi and Nam Linh Son remained to be external museum together with studies of artifacts kept in An Giang Museum, it is understandable about relics in this region. We had excavated at residential relic Go Tu Tram at the foot of Ba The (Pad The) mountain twice by using stratigraphic method to find the date of the Oc Eo - Ba The Relics as well as we have excavated Go Thap Relic in Dong Thap province several times. Owing to case studies in Go Thap Relic, we have found numerous Hindu temples, residential relics and valuable artifacts. By studying artifacts in An Giang Museum, we can conduct a comparative study between Dong Thap Relic and Oc Eo - Ba The One, which helped us dating back Oc Eo Culture from the 2nd century BC to the early 7th century AD and post Oc Eo from the middle 7th century AD to the 12th century AD; furthermore, it is clearly confirmed about the functions of relics in this region, according to which they used to be Hindu temples; and numerous artifacts linked with the temples were named.

Key words: Oc Eo Culture; Hindu temples; Oc Eo.

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1. Studies before 1975

Any discussion of the study of Oc Eo and Oc Eo culture before 1975, we can't help mentioning the French scholar Louis Malleret (1901-1970), who devoted considerable efforts and made path-breaking contributions to the study of this culture. His achievements related to Oc Eo Culture are embodied in the four volumes under the title Archaeology of the Mekong Delta (*L'archéologie du Delta du Mékong*) published from 1959 to 1963, in which Volume 1 was published in 1959: The archaeological exploration and excavation of Oc Eo (*L'exploration archéologique et les fouilles d'Oc-Éo*) [12]; Volume 2 in 1960: Material Civilization of Oc Eo (*La civilisation matérielle d'Oc-Éo*) [13]; Volume 3 in 1962: Funan Culture (*La culture du Fou-Nan*) [14]; and Volume 4: The left bank of the Hau River in the Southeast (*Le Sisbassac*) [15].

On April 11, 1942, Louis Malleret conducted an initial survey on Oc Eo lands in the village of My Lam, Kien Hao District, Gach Gia Province (now belonging to Oc Eo town, Thoai Son Distric, An Giang province). There, he met hundreds of people panning for gold. While conducting a brief survey over the whole area, Louis Maleret noticed numerous high mounds (called "Giong" in Vietnamese) which turned out to hold ancient architectural works and low-lying areas. For example, one of these mounds, Giong Cat, consisted of a two-metre high mound with a one-metre high brick wall as well as four monolithic slabs of sandstone which have mortises latch or mortices. To the east of Giong Cat, he also noted the presence of a mound known as Cay Trom mound, where the survey found a naturalistic 1.73 metre high linga sunken in the mud, then it was brought into the Museum Blanchard de la Brosse (now Ho Chi Minh City History Museum); Two kilometres away to the South lay Ong Mon Mound, on which stood a statue of a male god carved in sandstone which later was also brought into Ho Chi Minh City History Museum; About 1.1 km the West appeared another mound called Cay Thi Mound, which was much higher than the other mounds, and upon which stood the remains of an ancient temple. On the mound there was a brick wall 4 metres in high; on both sides of the steep mound, the sites were scattered with many large-sized bricks. Towards the south-west was Oc Eo Mound which was raided many times by robbers. The east side of the mound was adjacent to a low-lying area stretching from the northeast to the southwest, with passages of walls exposed as soil was recently unearthed. In addition to fieldwork, Louis Malleret also acquired materials from the aircraft survey carried out by Pierre Paris from 1931 to 1942, through which he was able to detect the presence of 5 ancient canals, also conducted his own survey by plane, detecting 23 other canals. Among these canals the most important and the longest was the 110km canal connecting Ankor Borei to Oc Eo, and stretching all across the Mekong Delta to the Ca Mau peninsula. With much financial support, Louis Malleret was able to buy back the majority of the artifacts which were dug up and taken away by robbers. Right from late 1942, surveys over the entire area convinced of the existence of an extensive city of Oc Eo. Through aerial photographs provided by the Department of Land Registry, he calculated that the area of the city of Oc Eo measured 3 km long and 1.5 km wide, equal to 450 hectares in the form of a large rectangle [12: 98-101]. Inspired by the results of these surveys, Louis Malleret made series of excavations lasting 3 months during the dry season in 1944. He divided the city of Oc Eo into 10 zones: Zone I (northwest) with relics such as Giong Da, Dien Dien Mound, Mon Mound, etc; Zone II (northwest) with relics such as Cay Trom Mound, Mo Coi Mound, etc; Zone III (center-west) with relics such as Cay Thi Mound, Ong Mang Mound, etc; Zone V (center-west) with relics such as Oc Eo Mound, etc; from Zone VI to Zone X (central, east and south) are part of a large low-land area containing Gieng Da and Go De relics, etc. Within these zones, Louis Malleret's

excavation work focused on Zones I, II, III, and V [12: 187-198]. Ba The (Pad The) is a small mountain range consisting of granite formation, and the relic is mainly located in the north, east and south sides of the Ba The mountain slopes. This is only 1.5m southeast off Oc Eo, and it is possible to assume that there may have been significant relations between Oc Eo and Ba The. The Ba The mountain range consists of three summits, including two large ones; the highest of the three is about 220m high. A. Corre – a doctor in the French colonial marine corps was the first to set foot on Ba The and wrote a report dated December 19, 1879, which was published in the magazine *Excursion and Explorations (Excursions et Reconnaissances)*. Doctor Corre was the first to discover two inscriptions in Sanskrit at Ba The carved into sandstone slabs. One inscribed slab is made of sandstone, 0.80m x 0.40m in size, ID:K4, dating from around the 10th century; the second is also made of sandstone, 1.60m x 0.80m x 0.20m in size, dating back from around the 8th century. At the entrance to the main gate of Linh Son Pagoda (an ancient pagoda on the side of Ba The mountain) were placed two plates of schist rock, to where doctor Corre led Anymonier (Eltienne Anymonier (1844-1929) – a French Archaeologist), who then recognized a door still and two door panels. After 1912, these two door panels were moved to the two sides of the central sanctum of Linh Son Pagoda. Only the door panel located on the right of the Buddha in the central sanctum has writings. In January 1912, while leveling the mound in the northeast ridge to build a communal house, at a depth of 2m, villagers discovered a large stone statue of Vishnu, wearing a cylindrical hat and lying with 4 hands on the 7-headed snake Ananta. When discovered, the statue was lying in a north-south position. However, this Vishnu statue was later moved to Linh Son Pagoda, 1.200m to the south of its original position. After being moved, it was also changed into a four-handed seated Buddha – the main Buddha in the Pagoda. On February 2, 1922, H. Parmentier and L. Finot paid a visit to Ba The and found the lintel made of sandstone located outside Linh Son Pagoda. The lintel was brought to the front of the altar in Linh Son Pagoda. In 1928, the officer Duvernoy (The French administrator) had the Vishnu statue removed from the pagoda and sent it to Blanchard de la Brosse (Ho Chi Minh City History Museum) in fulfillment of a request from Jean Bouchot, an archivist for the Government of Cochinchina. Suzanne Karpeles (The French scholar Suzanne Karpels (1890-1969), she worked at L'École française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO) in Hanoi) visited Ba The in January and February 1928. The report dated march 15, 1928 recorded such artifacts as two busts of gray sandstone; one of which was a female statue of 0.25m high; the other of which was 0.70m high with 4 hands. In addition, there was one hatted statue of the god Surya with a halo round its head, holding a lotus bud in each hand; 1 small linga, etc. in 1928, on the occasion of the inauguration of the Museum Blanchard de la Brosse (now Ho Chi Minh City History Museum), Jean Bouchot ordered the transport from Ba The to Ho Chi Minh city such artifacts as one lintel, one Surya god statue, one mukhalinga statue, and one linga. In 1936, Vice president of Long Xuyen Province Fraisse sent to Blanchard de la Brosse Hari-hara statue head. By March 9, 1945, L. Malleret found 14 previously unknown traces surrounding Ba The Mountain, mainly in the north, east and south. In Ba The, 18 statues, intact or broken into fragments, were found. Thus, Louis Malleret thought that after Oc Eo was destroyed, the residents may have moved up Ba The mountainside to avoid flood [12: 75-92].

2. Studies after 1975

2.1. Oc Eo – Ba The Relic

2.1.1. Stone Mound Relics of Small Scale

In 1975, after several excavations were conducted in Oc Eo Relic and other places in Mekong Delta, a science conference with the publication of the proceeding titled “*Oc Eo Culture and Ancient Cultures of Mekong Delta*” was held in Long Xuyen in 1984 [24]. This research over the large area of Oc Eo site covering approximately 450 hectares, with a length of nearly 3 km from south to north direction. In addition to the huge rising mounds at Oc Eo, Cay Thi, Giong Cat, Cay Trom, etc, there were also 25 “Da” mounds of smaller scale, each about 0.4-1.5m higher than surrounding field, and with the surface area of 50m²-100m² in size, scattering all around the relic from north to south. In March 1983, Institute of Social Science Ho Chi Minh City (now Southern Institute of Social Sciences) in collaboration with An Giang Department of Culture and Information, (now An Giang Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism) conducted excavations those mounds. Of 25 mounds, 8 were excavated including A1 (Cay Coc Mound), A3 (Song Doi Mound), A3’, A5, A6, A7, Doi 1 Mound, Doi 2 Mound. According to the excavators who directly excavated, these stone mounds had relatively different surface structure and interior architectures. Some such as Mound A1 and A3 were meticulously built. But others like Mound A5 were built in a relatively simple manner. However, despite these differences, they were quite similar in terms of materials i.e. stone and sand were used to build hollow square building blocks which were filled with white sand. In some of the mounds gold and precious stone were built inside. They were determined to be ancient tombs by the excavators [11: 189-198].

Recently, when conducting four studies: “*Archaeological Sites of Pre-Oc Eo Period in South West Vietnam*”, “*The Religious Centers of The Oc Eo Culture in the South of Vietnam*”, “*Funan Kingdoms in the South of Vietnam*” and “*Overall Study on Natural, Socio-economic Conditions, Historical-cultural Values for Sustainable Development of Thoai Son District, An Giang province*”, we visited Oc Eo- Ba The Relic and excavated Tu Tram I and II Mounds at the foot of Ba The mountain. Having studied the excavated relics and those kept in An Giang Museum, we agreed that Oc Eo was an urban area as Louis Malleret had proposed with the pre-port Nen Chua (Ta Kev). After Tu Tram I mound had been excavated three times, Center for Archaeology Studies – Southern Institute of Social Sciences in collaboration with École française d'Extrême-Orient (Republic France) and An Giang Museum excavated the first time in 2002. Center for Archaeology Studies – Southern Institute of Social Sciences in collaboration with Sophia University, Japan and An Giang Museum excavated for the second time in 2005. University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Ho Chi Minh City in collaboration with An Giang Department of Culture – Information (now An Giang Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism) excavated for the third time in 2008 and then excavated Tu Tram II mound in 2011 in order to find when the ancient residents of Tu Tram Mound lived. The results demonstrated that Tu tram mound residents resided in this place in the 2nd century BC and after the collapse of Funan, the residents still lived there until the 12th century. The evidence for these conclusions is particularly clear in the excavated ruins of Tu Tram Mound, the cultural layers appeared and continuously developed. The bottom layer contained orange and black potteries, and contained Bodhi-leaf; shaped tiles dating back to the 2nd century Before Christ; the top layer had roof tiles which consisted of tube-tiles with a people-sitting pattern, as well as a celadon ceramic box with a pumpkin shape that can be dated from the 12th century. Japanese archaeologist Yuko Hirano became involved in the excavation of Tu Tram (Tu Tram mound I) in 2005. Based on an analysis of the evolution of ceramics and tiles in the cultural layers in this relic, Yuko Hirano proposed in the 19th Indo-Pacific Pre-History Association Congress held in Hanoi in 2009 that there were three stages of development in Tu Tram mound: the early stage of Oc Eo from the 1st century BC to

the 3rd, the developing stage from the 3rd and 4th centuries to the 6th century, and the post-period stage of Oc Eo (last stage) from the 7th to 12th centuries[26].

In the two years between 1982 and 1983, archaeologists carried out excavations of 8 relics Go Da mound, and at that time came to the conclusion that they were “cremation graves”[5: 223-232]. However, according to ancient Chinese documents like The book of Liang, the Oc Eo culture is the cultural foundation of Funan. The Funan people had 4 burial customs: water burial, cremation, inhumanation and bird burial (celestial burial) [16:182]. Similarly, the Oc Eo culture, a culture strongly influenced by traditional Indian culture, had Hindu cremation custom with the cremation ashes dropped down into Gange River. Therefore, we claimed that these Go Da mounds to be Hindu temples not cremation graves. According to publications in “*Oc Eo Culture and other Ancient Cultures of Mekong Delta*” and “*Oc Eo Culture – Recent Discoveries*” [5], looking at their contents and drawings, we recognized some different characteristics of 4 types of temples found at Go Da mounds of Oc Eo site as following:

Type 1: Mound A1 - Surya Temple: Built of stone outside, filled with rock and sand inside, with a big semicircle rock in the east, with a square box built of stone in the western central, with a square hole in the middle

Mound A1-Surya temple is known as Cay Coc Mound or Ong Boong Mound with an area of approximately 100m², 1.5m higher than the field surface. The mound was covered with a layer of granite and sand, which was the highest mound out of the 25 mounds in the relic. Mound A1 consisted of truncated pyramid architecture with the outside having many large granite blocks (0.4m x 0.5m) arranging in four oblique-beveled wall edges, with two 12m-long east-west wall bases, two 10mlong north-south wall bases, a 8.5m-long east-west architectural surface and a 7.5m-wide north-south architectural surface. In this type 1, stone walls were buried deep down into the rice field about 2m deep, such that the walls were 3m high from the base to the peak. The outside of the stone walls were rather flat, solid and elaborately built. The inside was built like a pyramid. The eastern part was chocked with large rocks and filled with sand up to the top of the stone walls. Notably, on the east walls, in the middle, was placed a large semicircle stone of 0.8m diameter with two sides flat and the arch turning eastward. The western half was also chocked with a number of large rocks around. In the middle were arranged medium-sized stones in the form of a square box whose vertical walls were of 2.5m each side, and whose depth was 2m, filled up with rock layers and sand of different colors. In the middle of the hole was a square box of 0.8m high and with 0.5m sides. The square box was filled with light pink clay. The semicircle could be a symbol of the sun god or the sun god’s 8-spoke wheel of the cart pulled by 7 horses which shiningly passed across the heavens, reined by Aruna – God or Dawn. This was represented in the sun god temple (Surya) Konarak in North India, built around the year 1240 [17: 225-226]; in the west lay a 0.80m high cylinder built of marble, filled with plastic clay of light pink colour which was indeed the colour of the sun, etc. Therefore, there is a significant possibility that the Mound A1 was the sun god temple to Surya, the temple of the early type in Oc Eo – Ba The relic [20: 40].

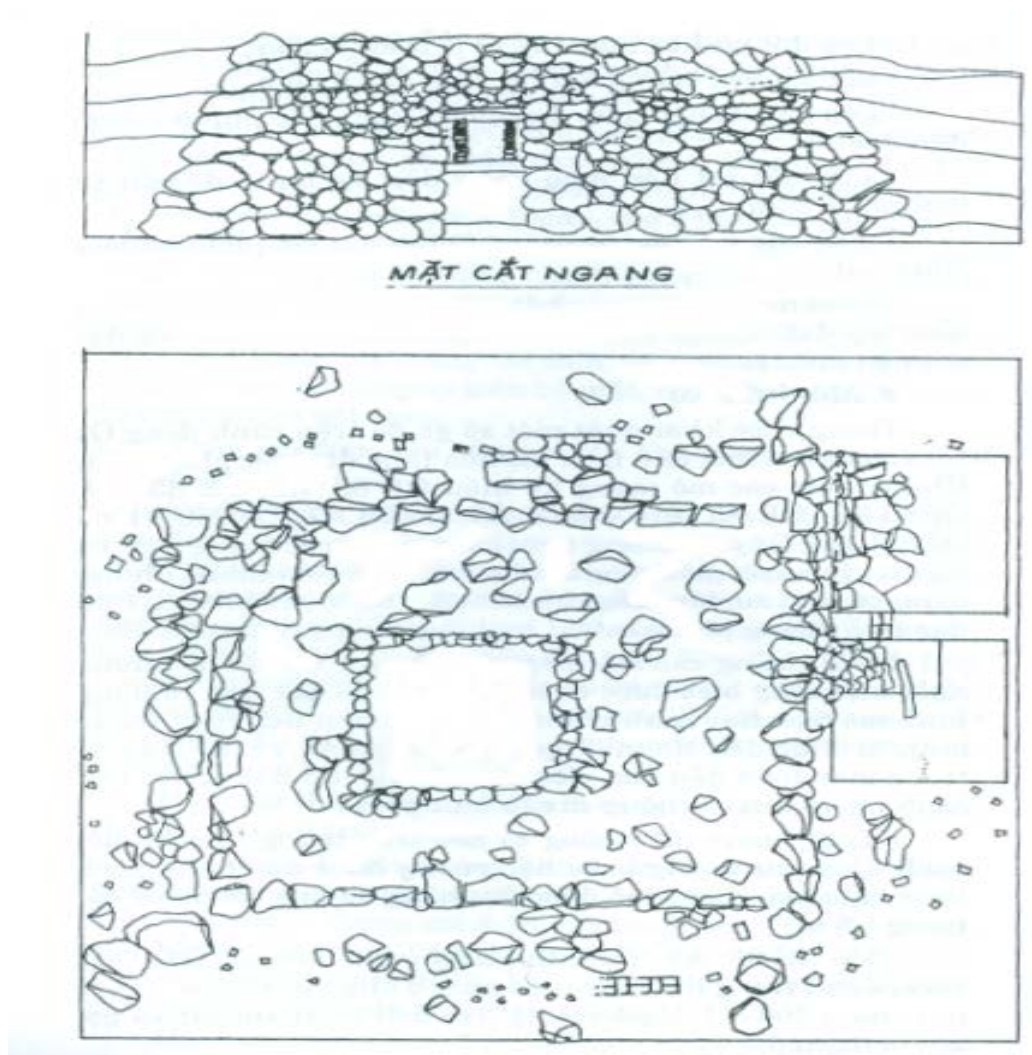


Figure 1: Cross – section and plan of Mound A1 – Surya Temple

Source: Lê Xuân Diệm, Đào Linh Côn, Võ Sĩ Khải (1995), p.224

Type 2 – Mound A3 Surya Temple: a rectangular stone-border architecture, the west center built of stone in the form of a circle leaving a hole in the middle with funnel-shaped section

This type can be seen in Mound A3 Surya temple (known as Ong Con Mound or Song Doi Mound as there was a small mound next to it called A3' mound), which lay 300m north of Cay Trom mound. The mound surface was roughly circular, with an area of about 100m², and was built around 0.5-0.6m higher than the rice field, with a surface in the form of a rectangle rimmed by granite and sand, 7m long in the east-west direction, 5m wide in the north-south direction. In the west was a square/round construction of granite of 1.8m each side, leaving a round in the middle of 1.4m deep, with the bottom side of 1.3m, lying on dark gray soil. In bottom floor, which was built of rock, there were 8 conical terracotta bars, similar to those found in Giong Am relic (Can Gio district, Ho Chi Minh City). This square center had a brick square, only one brick layer high, 0.63m long in the east-west, 0.53m wide in the north-south, filled with sand. Deeper down was a layer of hard-rammed plastic clay of green and yellow, funnel-shaped, 1.35m deeper than the surface of dark gray [11: 226]. The structure had a

centre built of square/round stone with a funne-shaped bottom, which is very similar to H11 architecture in Go Thap (Dong Thap province). Inside the funnel in Go Thap was found a sun-shaped gold sliver with 8 rays, or the Sun cart's wheel with 8 spokes, being the symbol of the sun god temple. Hence, mound A3 is more likely to be a temple to the sun god Surya [20:40].

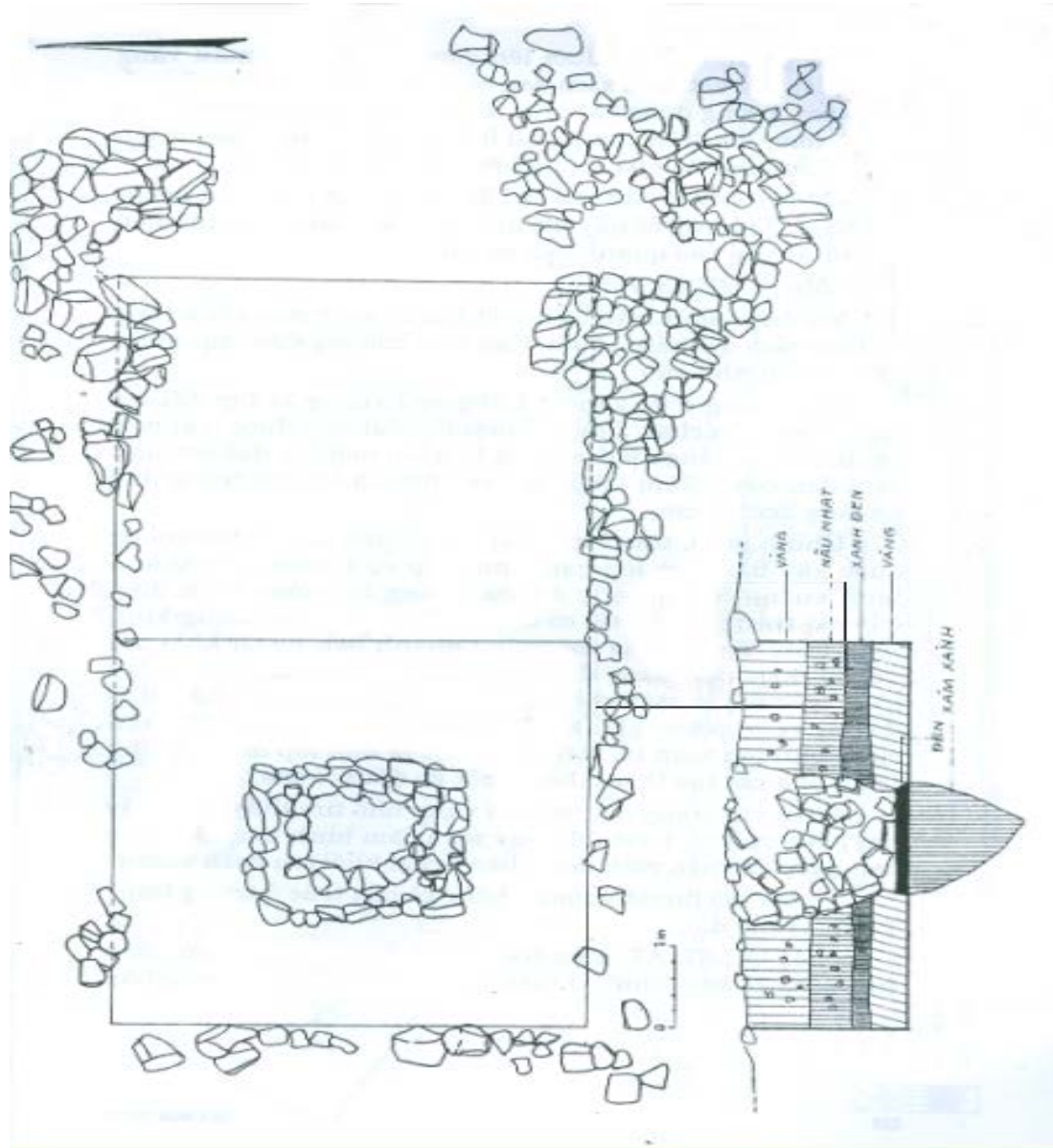


Figure 2: Cross - section of Mound A3 Surya Temple

Source: Lê Xuân Diệm, Đào Linh Côn, Võ Sĩ Khải (1995), p.227

Type 3 – Mound A5 Hindu Temple: Square structure built of stone, sand, rammed clay with the center having brick blocks, a square hole in the middle with golden objects, and filled with white sand

This type is typified in the Mound A5, which is around 150m to the east off Cay Trom mound, 50m away from mound A1, with the surface area of over 20m², about 0.4m above the field level. This structure was built of

stone and rammed clay, of square form, with each side being 1.1m, with a mud wall being 0.6m deep, a white sand layer of about 0.02-0.03m thick on the top, and a layer of hard-rammed dark gray and yellow clay on the bottom. In the middle of this square architecture, on the white sand layer, was a square shape constructed of three brick layers with four bricks each arranged in a square with a square hole in the middle. The square hole was filled with white sand. A small stone of 0.05m diameter was placed on the surface. On the bottom of the square brick pillar was found a small gold sliver which was laminated thin; outside the square brick pillar was found an orange hemispherical gemstone [11:195-196; 5:288]. Therefore, we claim that it is possible for Mound A5 to be a Hindu temple.

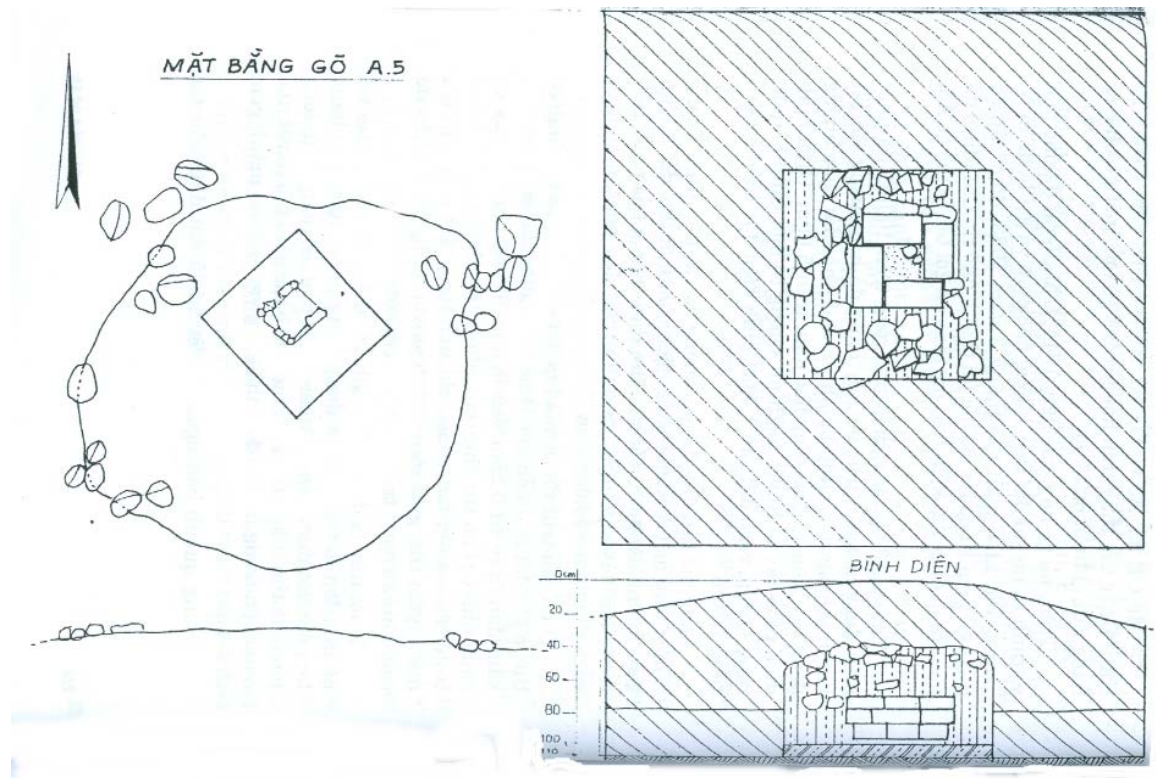


Figure 3: Cross – section and plan of Mound A5 Hindu Temple

Source: Lê Xuân Diệm, Đào Linh Côn, Võ Sĩ Khải (1995), p.229

Type 4 –Mound A7 Hindu Temple: built into a square box and sand with adhesive

This type can be seen in the mound A7, which was about 50m to the southeast off Cay Trom mound, with an area of about 50m², 0.5m above the field. On the ground was tight-rammed yellow clay. On the surface was a thin layer of sand, on which was a parallelepiped structure in a nearly square shape built of stone and sand with adhesive, with dimensions of 1.3m x 1.4m x 1.5m. The structure was white sand-filled. Under the square stone block was found a small gold flake and a red-plum coloured gemstone [11: 195; 5:228=232]. Hence, we claim that Mound A7 is possibly a Hindu temple.

In centuries BC, India had the tradition of creating sculptures of human figures; however, Buddha was not

represented in human form, but through symbolic images such as the lotus (a symbol of the birth of prince Siddhartha), the Bodhi Tree (where Buddha attained Buddhahood), the wheel of dharmacakra (symbolizing the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, also mentioning Buddha's first preaching in Sarnath Garden. This is called the aniconic time [27]. In Kusan period (30-320 AD), the gold coins of the Kaniska kings had a king-face on one side and the Buddha image in a standing position on the other side (due to the influence of gold Greek coins). That was the first time the Buddha image appeared, later appeared the stone Buddha of larger size. This time onwards began an iconic period (from the 1st century AD) in Buddhist art in India [17: 103-104]. And the iconic time in Indian Buddhist art exerted strong effects and created iconic art period in Hindu art in India which strongly developed in the Gupta period (320-550).

Oc Eo culture was influenced by Indian culture. In the early stage of Oc Eo culture, the Hindu god, the god's symbol, the god's mount, etc. were shown on gold slivers, and because of the gold elements, they were taken into Seima and placed on the ground right in the temple, showing the presence of God in the temple, as can be seen in the Hindu temples found in Go Thap (Dong Thap province) [19: 71-90]. In the later stage, when the god was expressed on rocks with larger dimensions, the god was put on Hindu temples. Thus mounds A5 and A7 were very likely to be Hindu temples rather than cremation graves.

2.1.2. The Large-scale Architectural Relics

Shiva Temple Cay Trom Mound (Manduka Mandala Type)

In March 1983, the Institute of Social Sciences in Ho Chi Minh City excavated a large high-rise mound – Cay Trom mound architecture relic, with the excavated area of nearly the entire relic $30\text{m} \times 15\text{m} = 450\text{m}^2$. After digging out the topsoil surface of 0.3-0.4m thick, a planed chart of brick architecture emerged which consisted of two parts or two flat ground surfaces with elevation difference of approximately 0.4m. The high ground on the west side remained only just in the form of a tiles here and there, with a width of approximately 5 meters to the west. The low ground floor on the east side is the main floor of the architecture with a width of 24 meters in the east-west direction. On the ground were built 5 parallel brick lines in east-west direction with each line from 0.8m to 1.4m wide, and 7 brick lines running parallel in north-south direction with each line of 0.8m wide, dividing the architecture into 26 squares and rectangles of different sizes, 22 rectangles which has an average size from 1.5m x 0.8m to 4m x 2m, and 4 squares which were 1.5m wide on each size. The brick lines remains consists of only one layer of bricks here and 7-8 layers of bricks there. The bricks had the average size of 0.3 x 0.12m x 0.06m. They were of light pink, pinkish red with a shade of black. According to the excavators, Cay Trom Mound is an open air architecture with no walls and no roof, "this can be fairly guessed to be the relic of god worship, of memorial, of prayer for good luck and blessing" [23: 206-212; 5: 167-174].

As the architecture ruins of Cay Trom mound had no roof as a measure of preservation, we could only base our analysis on the data of the survey, excavation and study available of this relic. Based on the presence of various building materials in the Cay trom Mound and the presence of a stone linga it is likely that Cay Trom temple relic was a Shiva temple, dating from the 1st century to the 12th century. The temple had granite materials in the low layer, bricks of average size which in our view were type-2 brick in the upper layer; The temple appears to

have been built through 3 stages:

- Early Oc Eo culture (from the 2nd century BC to the 2nd century AD): granite architecture
- Deveoping Oc Eo culture (from the 3rd century to the 6th century): architecture of type-2 large-size bricks
- Post-Oc Eo culture (from the 7th century to the 12th century): architecture of type-2 medium-size bricks, of type-3 bricks, of type-4 bricks [18: 772-776].

As for the naturalistic linga (Linga d'aspect naturaliste) made of stone, of 1.73m high, found at Cay Trom Temple, it was among the largest found in the Mekong Delta. This naturalistic stone linga was considered to be very ancient. It was worshipped in the central Shiva temple at Chennittalai in Travancore village in the South of India, dating back to the 1st century AD [12: 380-381]. Particularly in the Mekong Delta, according to Louis Malleret, the naturalistic form of Linga had to precede the stylized form. The naturalistic linga at Cay Trom mound may have dated back to the late 5th century, or the early 6th century [12: 379-380]. This was the largest linga of a naturalistic kind. This linga was expressed as male reproductive organ of naturalism, with a form that wasnot yet conventionalized. The relic had a round base with an oblong upperportion, as well as a rounded head which was sometimes slightly shrunk. The nick in the front face of the linga's head and sacred columns were softly embossed, bringing the upper part the form of a naturalistic glans penis. The large size of this relic was consistent with the scale of the architecture in this mound. On the surface of Cay Trom Mound has numerous squares and rectangles representing mandala tomb, a kind of Manduka Mandala, which is Hindu temple type with 64 Padas, in which the central square represents the main god Shiva and other gods surrounding, embodying Meru mountain in Hymalaya [30]. For Indian people, Himalaya is of a natural temple and other temples in India are built accordingly. The naturalistic stone linga found in Cay Trom temple showed that Cay Trom mound relic was a Shiva temple.

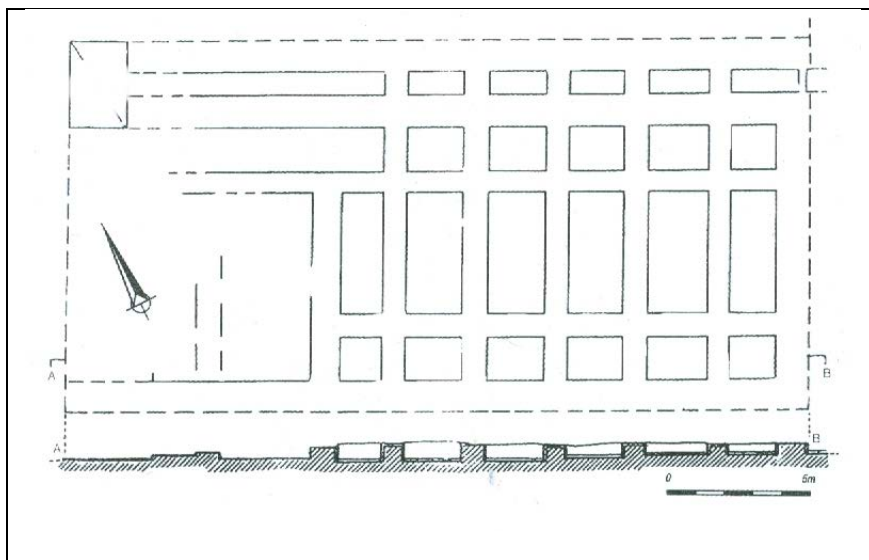


Figure 4: Cross - section of Shiva Temple in Cay Trom Mound, Oc Eo, An Giang

Source: Lê Thị Liên (2006), p.157



Figure 5: Naturalistic Linga Cay Trom Mound

Source: Museum of History Hồ Chí Minh City

Surya Temple Cay Thi Mound

Cay Thi mound lay approximately 260m away from Oc Eo mound to the south, about 500m away from Giong Cat to the northeast and about 1600m away from Linh Son relic on Ba The mountain slope to the northwest. The relic was discovered in 1942 and was first excavated by Louis malleret from 10 to 19 April, 1944 [12:233-277]. In 1999, archaeologists from the Southern Institute of Social Sciences in collaboration with the French School of

the Far East (École française d'Étreme-Orient), Cultural Centre of Thoai Son district and An Giang Museum conducted the excavation of Cay Thi mound with the purpose of once again uncovering the whole architecture that Louis Malleret dug in 1944 to learn the specifics of its structure, to assess the degree of decay in face of natural and human impacts, and to find factors which may have served as evidence of relic dating [9: 206]. The result of the restudy showed that Cay Thi mound faced east, with the plan chart of nearly square shape, divided into two rectangles: The central chamber was in the west and the ahll in the east. The excavators confirmed that "Cay Thi mound was a kind of royal architecture with religious nature" [9: 201-220].

Based on Louis Malleret's drawings, photographs and descriptions and Center for Archaeology's ones in 2009 as well as fieldwork method at the relic with preservation roof, in April 2011, we have recognized that the whole architecture in here is a kind of big, nearly in square shape (25m x 22m). The plan chart of Cay Thi mound was a combination of two rectangles – one large, one small (the central chamber: 22m x 16m, the front hall: 16,8 x 7.4m). The two sides in front of the hall (in the east) had two round protrusions on both northeast and southeast corners with three symmetrical corner breaks. At the two sides of the central chamber front lay a round shap similar to a wheel with a brick as the hub, and with three trapezium bricks as rays (about 1.4m in diameter). The round and the rays at the 2 sides of the hall front could possibly bear the sun symbol and the rays of the sun, or the sun god's 8-spoke wheel of the horse cart which shiningly passed across the heavens – a popular symbol displayed at large sun temples in the work. Thus, Cay Thi mound temple was very likely a sungod temple [20: 40-44].

1999 saw the excavation of the front of Cay Thi mound, which was located adjacent to the northeast. The excavators recorded that the relic consisted of architecture with different stages of development: The first stage shwed walls with stone foundation inside, layers of rammed clay with coal-ash pit in the center and possibly unexcavated stone foundation deep down in the earth beneath the mound on the west side. The coal ash pit in the center bore funnel shape. C14 coal samples were analyzed to prove dating back to 1840 ± 60 years away from now, i.e. about the year 110; the next stage showed brick foundation walls and brick corridors in the form of turning cornes on the outside. At this stage, the architectural plan chart almost entirely changed in the size, layout and construction materials [2: 759]. The relic in front of Cay Thi mound was a Stepped pond, which was a part of the complex relic and located near to a Hindu temple in India. The water in the stepped pond was considered to be the sacred water of the Ganges, and was used to purify rituals and Hindu rituals [29]. Studying the architecture of Stepped pond of Cay Thi mound may have resulted in similar findings like a stepped pond found adjacent to the northeast ahead of Minh Su mound (Dong Thap province) [22:86]. Hence, the relic in front of Cay Thi mound was a stepped pond of Cay Thi mound's Sun god temple.

Shiva Temple Nam Linh Son

Nam Linh Son architecture was located on the eastern slope of Ba The mountain. This relic was discovered in 1993, after which an investigating hole was opened. After that, the archaeologist from the Institute of Southern Sustainable Development in collaboration with the French school of Far East (École française d'Étreme-Orient, EFEO), the Cultural Center in Thoai Son district and the An Giang Museum, conducted two excavations. The first lasted from February to March 1998 and the second one lasted from May to June 1999.



Figure 6: Symbol of Sun, Cay Thi Mound

Source: *An Giang Museum*



Figure 7: Stepped pond, Cay Thi mound

Source: *Đặng Văn Thắng*

The 1998 excavation revealed a large architecture built of bricks and stone of rather scale, about 22m long in

east-west direction, over 17m wide in north-south direction. During this excavation, the excavators found a big jar near original earth. This big jar was assumed to be a “jar-style reburial grave” made of coarse ceramic, black clay, covered red on the body, 67cm in diameter and 40cm high. This jar was covered with a large bowl-shaped lid, and a solid fine red clay body. In the jar, in addition to sand, there were some small pieces of organic materials, 5 laminated gold beads (the largest bead was of 6mm long) and one broken agate bead. Since the 1993 excavation, eight C14-dating analyses of Nam Linh Son coal samples gave results in a chronological order as follow:

Sample *LS2/1 WK-6340*: 1990 ± 50 BP = 40 ± 50 BC.

Sample *LS93 HCM-93*: 1880 ± 50 BP = 70 ± 50 AD.

Sample *LS1/5 WK-6344*: 1276 ± 70 BP = 690 ± 70 AD.

Sample *LS1/7 WK-6346*: 1220 ± 50 BP = 730 ± 50 AD.

Sample *LS1/2 WK-6341*: 1190 ± 70 BP = 760 ± 70 AD.

Sample *LS1/6 WK-6345*: 1170 ± 80 BP = 780 ± 80 AD.

Sample *LS1/4 WK-6343*: 1110 ± 70 BP = 840 ± 70 AD.

Sample *LS1/3 WK-6342*: 1070 ± 50 BP = 880 ± 50 AD.

According to archaeologists who directly did the unearthing, Nam Linh Son architecture was built in the Oc Eo era and continued existing until the 9th century, ranging from the year 40 to the year 880 [8:39]. Nam Linh Son architecture proved to be a major art of construction using stone and brick in the Oc Eo era and the post Oc Eo era. This is the kind of royal architecture of religious characteristics similar to the building block currently located in the mountain under Linh Son pagoda’s floor in the north, and related to all the relics on the eastern slopes across the road into the foot of the mountain [7:237-265].



Figure 8: Shiva Temple Nam Linh Son

Source: *Đặng Văn Thắng*



Figure 9: Somasutra

Source: *Đặng Văn Thắng*

Through fieldwork conducted to survey the relic site, and through study of relevant documents, Linh Son Nam Temple may have had some such notable features as basing consisting of 3 drains for holy water (Somasutra) built of brick that the excavations referred to as “sewerage”, indicating that the Linh Son nam relic could have been built over four construction and renovation phases as follow:

-Phase 1: the architecture was built with stone foundation. In the center was placed a pottery jar with gold objects, agate objects as offerings to God. This was the early stage of Oc Eo culture.

-Phase 2: the architecture was built with stone and brick foundation; type-2 brick of dimensions of 34.5cm x17x8cm, x 33x17x8cm; the deepest drainage flowing to the west then to the north. This was the early stage of Oc Eo culture.

-Phase 3: the architecture was built with stone and brick foundation; type-2 brick of dimensions of 34.5x17x8cm, 33x17x8cm; drainage throughs located in the centre flowing to the west then to the north. This was the stage of developed Oc Eo culture.

-Phase 4: the architecture was built with stone and brick foundation; type-2 brick of average size of 30x14x8cm, 29.5x14x6cm; tube tiles; drainage throughs located high in the flow direction to the east then to the north. This was post-Oc Eo period.

It could be said that the water pipelines built in Nam Linh Son Temple were sacred drains for holy water and that this was thus a *Shiva temple*. The appearance of up to 3 sacred drains of different heights in this temple was due to construction and restoration at different times [20:50-53].

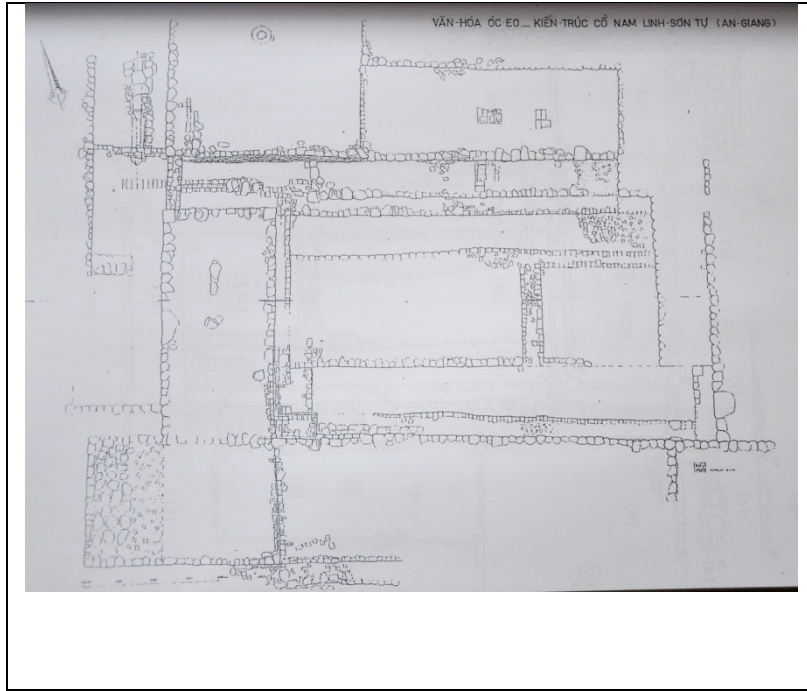


Figure 10: Plan of Shiva Temple Nam Linh Son (Having pottery jar)

Source: *Management Committee of Oc Eo Culture*

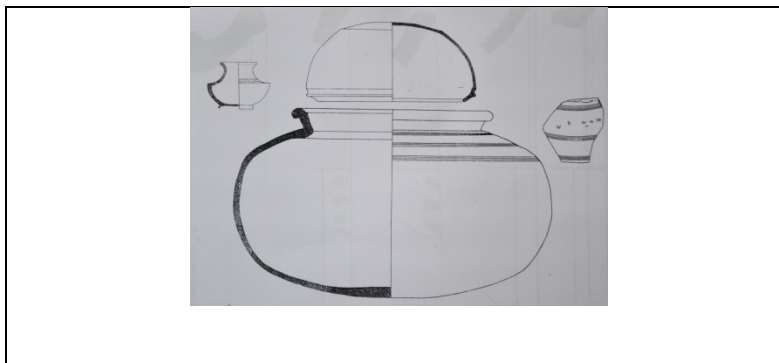


Figure 11: Pottery jar in Shiva Temple Nam Linh Son

Source: *Management Committee of Oc Eo Culture*

Vishnu Temple Linh Sơn Tự

Linh Son ancient pagoda was also called “Ba The mountain 4-handed Buddha Pagoda” because the Buddha statue worshipped on the pagoda’ s main altar was a 4-handed stone statue. According to Louis Malleret, this was a giant Vishnu statue lying on the 7-headed snake Ananta (shesha) with 4 arms, the rear left hand of which was holding a sphere, the rear left hand of which rose and bent behind the head, but not accompanied by Brahma born from umbilicus lying on the lotus (the birth of Brahma). The statue was crafted with sandstone, found in January 1912 on the mound where the village communal house worshipping Vong The village Tutelary God now stands. The statue was brought to Linh Son Pagoda (about 1200m south off the place of discovery).

After being taken to the Pagoda, the Buddha statue was modified to become the seated Buddha, thus giving the statue two cemented artificial legs with visible height of 1.80m, and with the height of the entire statue being 3.35m [12:403-407]. The giant Vishnu stone statue lying on the 7-headed snake Ananta was fairly similar to the type of Vishnu stone relief, lying on the 7-headed snake Ananta found in northern India, in the Vishnu temple Dashavatara (Deogarh, Uttar Pradesh) in the Gupta period, about the year of 425. The temple was built of stone and was one of the earliest stone Hindu temples which still survived the test of time to the present day [28]. Furthermore, the temple reliefs were quite similar to the big Vishnu stone reliefs on the 7-headed snake Ananta, under the style of My Son E1 (the 8th century) found at My Son (Quang Nam) [25:36-37], as well as the Vishnu relief found in the village of Phu Tho (Quang Ngai) in 1904 [6:80]. Linh Son Pagoda is an unexcavated relic. However, with mighty power and imposingly height comparing to other relics like Oc Eo-Ba The Relic, there is much likelihood in the fact that Linh Son Pagoda was a Vishnu temple, as in the Vishnu Temple in Dong Thap Muoi – where two Vishnu statues were found when the temple was excavated in the Go Thap relic (Dong Thap province) [19:80-81].

2.1. Hindu Temple Đá Nổi

The Da Noi Relic, in Phu Tay Hamlet, Phu Thuan commune, Thoại Son district, An Giang Province, is distributed across an area of 1500m in the east-west direction and 1,000m in the north-south direction. The relic site was located 13km north of Long Xuyen City and 26km west of Ba The mountain. This relic was discovered in 1984 when local gold miners came to dig around Ba Chua Xu temple. In March 1985, the Institute of Social Sciences in Ho Chi Minh City teamed up in collaboration with An Giang Museum to conduct salvage archeology for mound architectures in this area. The archaeological team conducted the excavation of 7 architectural vestiges, discovered 331 items, 317 of which were made of gold, and most of which were carved with images of humans, animals, plants and ancient texts. After the excavation of the items, the archaeologists came to the conclusion that these 7 architectural relics were a kind of inhumation (coffin burial) because they were seen to be bearing "cremation" features of Oc Eo culture. The architectural elements were centred with a cylindrical block of bricks which was squared in a swastika style. The heart of the architecture (outside, around the square cylindrical block) was chocked with granite and white sand, or pounded with multiple layers of broken bricks and black plastic clay, with traces of ash in white sand layers in the central block, or mixed with black soil in the bottom of the architecture [5: 232]. However, after the process of investigation the materials uncovered by the excavation team, and after studying the architecture, relic structures and relic items, especially gold relics of 7 architectures in Da Noi (An Giang province), this initial assumption about the cremation function of the site was revised. If compared to the architecture where gold was found in Go Thap (Dong Thap province), Go Thanh (Tien Giang province), and if compared to Indian Hindu tradition (no cremation graves, but the dropping of the dead's ashes after the burning down to river, along with documents from ethnic people in the Theravada pagodas of the Khmer in the South of Vietnam. Lao people, etc. (Bon Banchoh Seima), we concluded that this relic was indeed a Hindu temple and a kind of Hypaethral Temple.

Shiva -Vishnu Temple 85ĐN-M2

The centre of the 85ĐN-M2 was built with a square cylindrical brick block in the shape of an altar pedestal clear

through from the bottom to a level nearly on a par with the layer of rocks and white sand on the top. At the same time, the items found in this square block included 103 gold objects, the majority of which were gold foils stamped with the divine bull nandin – the mount of the god Shiva, with the god Vishnu holding the sickle, with the snake Sesa – the mount of god Vishnu, with the goddess Lakshmi-god Vishnu's wife, etc. Furthermore, there was also a pedestal upon which stood a gold linga and a gold yoni, elements commonly seen in Shiva temples. Hence, the architecture of 85DN-M2 was likely to be a Shiva-Vishnu temple.

Vishnu Temple 85DN-M4

In addition to the centre with a swastika-shaped cylindrical brick block, the surrounding structure was arranged with 9 rectangular holes stuffed with granite and white sand, often buried with 2-3 bright red bricks. This architecture with holes could be also seen when Seima ceremonies (Bon banchoh Seima, inauguration) were held in Theravada Buddhist pagodas of the Khmer in the South [10: 613-624], Lao people, etc. One further item of significance was the fact that precious artifacts found among the relic items (including 162 gold items, 2 precious gemstones, and one coin piece) were largely artifacts related to Vishnu, including a gold foil carved with the god Vishnu holding the Sankha shell, Vishnu's foot, matcha fish, Kurma turtle, varaha boar (as the incarnations of god Vishny); Charka wheel, Sanka snail, Sankha snail combined with a lotus or nandin divine bull (as the symbol of the god Vishnu); Sea serpent, or Sea serpent combined with wheels, with the divine bird Garuda (the mount of Vishnu). Among these artifacts a number of gold foils consisted of a combination of many above-mentioned symbols [21:764-768]. Therefore, we claim that this architecture of 85DN-M4 used to be a Vishnu temple.

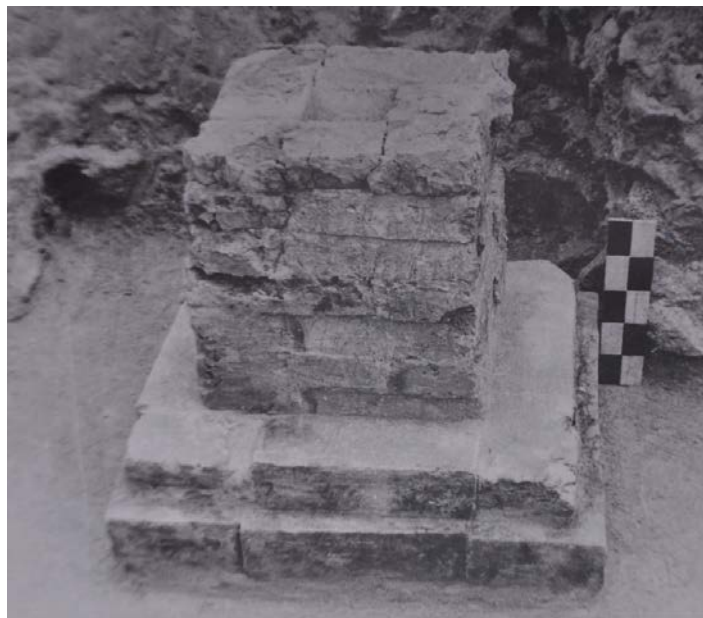


Figure 12: Cylindrical Brick Block in Swastika shape Shiva-Vishnu Temple 85DN-M2

Source: An Giang Museum



Figure 13: Vishnu's Foot on Gold Foil found in Cylindrical Brick Block in Swastika shape in Vishnu Temple 85ĐN-M4

Source: An Giang Museum

3. The Development Phase of Thoi Son Relic

Through a careful analysis of the relic discovered through survey, investigation and excavation in Thoi Son, particularly, based on results about pottery recorded in excavations at Tu Tram Mound of Yuko Mariko as well as our team, we set a new date frame from the 2nd century BC until the end of the 12th century for relics in Thoi Son. It is possible to further establish that the relics went through continuous progression and underwent 3 consecutive stages.

3.1. Early Stage (from the 2nd century BC to the 2nd century AD)

In the early stage of Oc Eo, Hindu temple architecture was built of stone, usually with wood embankments underneath; brick cylindrical blocks began to appear with large-sized bricks coloured red and light red (bricks made by loam combined with small grits) such as those seen in A3 mound, A5 mound, and A7 mound. In rock-arranged areas such as Cay Thi mound, or jar-placed areas such as Nam Linh Son, there were some places where swastika-shaped brick cylindrical blocks were built, sacred pillars whose bottom were put items often made of gold and carved with the images of gods. This was an ancient custom in India, a kind of Seima (which was mistaken by many to be tombs). At some other places there also appeared stepped Ponds as in Cay Thi mound.

3.2. Developing Stage (from the 3rd century AD to the 6th century AD)

In the second stage, known as the Oc Eo development stage, Hindu temple architecture was restored and

embellished in such a way as to upgrade older constructions, or to build new ones with bricks and stone – using a kind of large-sized bricks in a red or light red colour (bricks made by loam combined with small grits). In the temple were placed the Sun God Surya (possibly in Cay Thi mound), Vishnu, naturalistic Linga (in Cay Trom mound), 3-part Linga (Brahma at the bottom part, Vishnu in the middle part and Shiva in the top part), or Liga-Yoni with a drain Somasutra (Nam Linh Son), Hari-Hara stone statue. There was also a continuous use of stepped Ponds.

3.3. Late Stage (from the 7th century AD to the 12th century AD)

In the third stage, known as the Late-Oc Eo stage, the focus was to upgrade the old stone-made Hindu temples (highly built like the truncated one in A1 mound) with small-size bricks of the light yellow or ivory-white colour (bricks made by loam combined with large-grain sand and small-grain sand), with continuous use of the divine well (Cay Thi mound). In the temple were placed statues, the statue of the Sun God Surya (possibly at Cay Thi mound), Vishnu (possibly at Linh Son Pagoda), 2-part Linga (Vishnu at lower part and Shiva at upper part), and a 1-part Linga conjoined with Yoni (Shiva) possibly at Linh Son Nam). At this stage, architectural relics normally discovered were located on high ground. In addition to the A1-mound architecture in the middle of the Oc Eo field, most of the other architectures such as Linh Son Nam and Linh Son were on the foot of Ba The mountain slopes from 2m up above the surface of the field. This matched the documents about environmental changes – sea levels rise and the upheavals of Oc Eo society in the south of Vietnam in the 6th century AD [3: 137].

4. Conclusion

The excavations at Tu Tram Mound on the slope of Ba The mountain, Thoai Son district, An Giang province, we could date back the Oc Eo culture from the 2nd BC to the 12th century and this culture was divided into three stages: the Early Oc Eo (the 2nd century Bc – the 2nd century AD); the Developing Oc Eo (the 3rd century – the 6th century AD); and Late Oc Eo (the 7th century – the 12th century AD). We have studied the artifacts found at the relics of Thoai Son district, An Giang province such as the naturalistic stone-made linga at Cay Trom mound, numerous gold foils carved with god Shiva picture and his symbols like trisula, Nandin, Vishu's foot and his symbols like Garuda, Sankha, Chakra, Matcha, Kurma, Varaha, found at Da Noi relic, which contributed to identifying the owner of these temples. We have conducted Case Studies at Go Thap relic, Dong Thap province, meanwhile carefully investigated into the relics and their artifacts found in Oc Eo- Ba The and Da Noi relic in Thoai Son district, An Giang province, which leads us to reconfirm the relics excavated in here as relics of small scale: Surya temple Mound A1, Surya temple Mound A3, Hindu Temple Mound A5; relics of large scale: Shiva Temple Cay trom Mound, Surya temple Cay Thi Mound, Shiva Temple Nam Linh Son. In the Da Noi relic, it was not cremation graves but rather Hindu temples like Shiva-Vishnu temple 85DN-M2, Vishnu Temple DN-M4.

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