

THE CHAM, SA HUYNH AND HAN IN EARLY VIETNAM: EXCAVATIONS AT BUU CHAU HILL, TRA KIEU, 1993

Ian C. Glover¹, Mariko Yamagata² and William Southworth³

¹ Institute of Archaeology, Gordon Square, London WC1H 0PY, England

² Dept. Archaeology, University of Tokyo, Hongo, Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo 113, Japan

³ School of Oriental and African Studies, London, England

ABSTRACT

In this paper we present a preliminary report on a trial excavation in 1993 at an early historic city in Central Vietnam, discuss some of the background to the project and issues raised by the fieldwork.

DISCOVERY OF THE CHAM CIVILIZATION

Soon after the French had established themselves in Central Vietnam in the late 19th century they found a number of stone inscriptions written in Sanskrit and in an Austronesian language ancestral to that used by the Cham people who are today an ethnic minority of southern Vietnam. From the 1880s French scholars conducted an active programme of epigraphic, archaeological and art historical research which reconstructed the main outlines of an Indianized Cham Civilization which flourished for a thousand years from about the 5th century AD, built numerous temples dedicated mainly to Shiva and some Buddhist shrines, and competed with the Chinese, Khmer and Vietnamese for control of Indochina until they were pushed south and progressively reduced to dependant status by the Vietnamese from the mid 15th century. An important series of books and papers by Aymonier (1889); Arousseau (1914); (Parmentier 1909, 1918); (Maspero 1929); Claeys (1927, 1928) and Stein (1947-9) among others established the Cham as a major early Southeast Asian historic civilization. Coedès (1968) and Taylor (1983, 1992) provide more recent summaries of Cham history and their relations with the Khmer and Vietnamese and a brief popular account of Cham monu-

ments as they survive today was recently published by Ciochon and James (1992).

THE SA HUYNH CULTURE

Since the independence of North Vietnam in 1954 Vietnamese scholars (Ha Van Tan 1980) have rather naturally emphasised research into the prehistory and early history of the Lacviet peoples of Bac Bo and especially the brilliant Bronze Age Dong Son Culture of the Red and Ma River valleys. It is only quite recently that sustained field archaeological programmes have been undertaken in Central and Southern Vietnam into the prehistoric background to the historic Cham culture. These have mainly focused on the metal age Sa Huynh culture named after an urn-burial site close to the sea in Quang Ngai Province which was first investigated by M. Vinet, a local customs official, and later investigated by Labarre and again by Parmentier (1924). Sa Huynh burial assemblages are typically found in coastal sand dunes and consist of large ovoid or cylindrical, thin-walled, lidded jars containing glass and semi-precious stone ornaments, iron and bronze tools and small bowls, pots and pedestal jars. On the basis of rather few radiocarbon dates and some Han coins at Hau Xa the Sa Huynh Culture is generally dated to between 600 BC – AD 200, although Ngo Si Hong, in a yet unpublished paper (Ngo n.d.), argues that the earliest, Long Thanh stage of the Sa Huynh Culture dates back to the late 2nd millennium BC and predates the arrival of iron. Vu Cong Quy (Quy 1991) has published a comprehensive summary of all work on the Sa Huynh Culture and identifies regional variants, each with three stages of development on the basis of a few radiocarbon dates, a typology of ceramic forms and the presence or absence of

bronze, iron, glass, coins and so on. However, Reinecke (1994) argues that the published evidence is still insufficient to show clear relationships between the stages of the Sa Huynh Culture claimed by Vietnamese archaeologists and that few sites are adequately dated. Despite these shortcomings, however, this new research promises that discussions of long-term developmental sequences in the pre- and proto-history of Central and Southern Vietnam will be better based, grounded in some solid data.

On the basis of their early discovery of the Sa Huynh Culture, French archaeologists speculated about the relationship between Cham and Sa Huynh peoples and were inclined to reject any connection. They realised that the Cham were clearly related to Austronesian speakers in Indonesia, particularly to the peoples of west Kalimantan and Aceh in North Sumatra and were thought to have been recent immigrants to Vietnam having come under Indian cultural influence further west. To some extent the French saw a parallel between their own arrival in the mid 19th century bringing "higher civilization" to Vietnam, and than of the Cham nearly two thousand years earlier. On the basis of their more recent work however, Vietnamese archaeologists posit a continuous evolutionary development from Late Sa Huynh to Cham Culture with the latter emerging about the 2nd century AD as a result of developing external trade relations with Indian, or Indianized, traders from the west and with the Sinitised Viet peoples to the north. The precise mechanism for this transformation is left a little vague which is not surprising given the relative lack of hard data. but Ngo Si Hong (n.d.) and Nguyen Chieu *et al.* (1991) both point to the continuity of ceramic forms and decoration between late Sa Huynh sites such as Hau Xa near Hoi-an and the early levels reached at Tra Kieu, which certainly became a major Cham capital in later centuries and which lies some 15 km inland from Hoi-an up the Thu Bon Valley. This emphasis on local evolutionary processes is clearly congruent with both Marxist historical theory and the needs of modern nation-building just as the French migratory hypothesis was with colonialist mentalities.

One implication of the new Vietnamese reconstruction which is not much discussed is that, if accurate, the Sa Huynh peoples would have spoken an Austronesian language which, though clearly intrusive into Vietnam, must have been established there much longer than linguists have generally allowed. This idea gains some support from the differentiation of Chamic languages in Central Vietnam which are spoken by some of the Montagnard tribal peoples of the interior such as the Gia-rai (Jarai) and E-de (Rhade) as well as by coastal wet-rice farmers, fishermen and traders. Sa Huynh culture is gen-

erally thought to have matured in the late centuries BC and vanished from archaeological visibility about the 1st-2nd centuries AD. Its cultural sphere was almost coterminous with the succeeding Cham territories.

THE VIETNAMESE-BRITISH ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECT

The role of long distance trade and Indian religious and commercial contacts in stimulating the transformation of the late prehistoric Iron Age village societies of Southeast Asia into nascent territorial states has long been an interest of one of the present authors (Glover 1990; Glover and Moore 1994) and following research on Iron Age sites in Thailand the extension of this interest into Sa Huynh-Cham relationships seemed a natural development. Following preliminary visits to Hanoi, Thanh Hoa and Danang between 1987 and 1990, agreement was reached for a collaborative research project between the Institute of Archaeology, University College London and the Institute of Archaeology in Hanoi, and the first field season was undertaken in early 1993 at Tra Kieu in Quangnam-Danang Province at a location which is plausibly identified as the citadel of the former Cham capital of Simhapura. Here we present a brief report on the fieldwork and offer some very preliminary interpretations as only a limited amount of post-excavation work has been undertaken and this will be continued in 1994 in Hanoi. The immediate aim of this project was to investigate the relationship between the late prehistoric Iron Age Sa Huynh Culture and the Cham civilization which had been postulated by Vietnamese archaeologists as discussed above.

THE SITE

Tra Kieu (108° 14' E, 15° 49' N.) is located in the Thu Bon River valley, about 18 km. inland from Hoi-an, formerly an important port known as Faifo to the Portuguese, the first western sailors in these waters, and 28 km south of Danang, the largest city on the central coast of Vietnam (Figures 1 and 2). Administratively, Tra Kieu belongs to Duy Xuyen district of Quangnam-Danang Province. The River Thu Bon, which has regularly changed course, now flows some distance north of the site across a large, flat alluvial plain. The site of Tra Kieu extends along the southern bank of the Ba Ren, a small tributary of the Thu Bon River and is dominated by Buu Chau (Jade Hill), now crowned by a Catholic shrine commemorating the resistance of Vietnamese Christians against government persecution in the late 19th century. The hill is commonly identified as the citadel of ancient

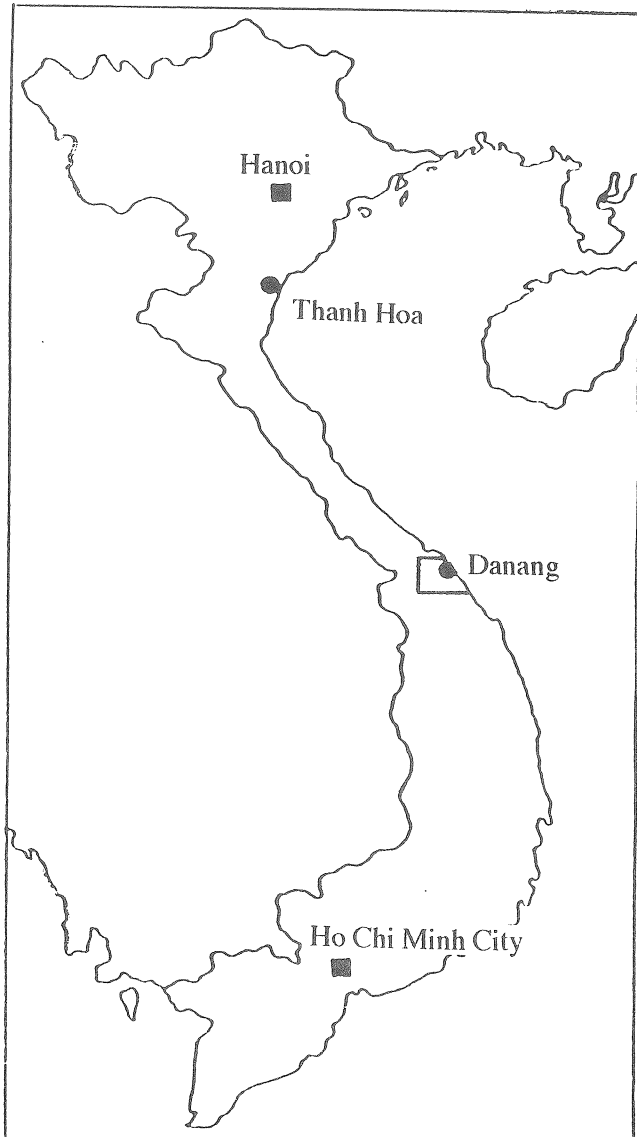


Figure 1: Vietnam, locating the study area

Simhapura, and from its summit there is a panoramic view of the whole area. Our excavation site was just underneath the northern side of Buu Chau hill (Figure 3).

At the time of our arrival in Vietnam in January 1993 Vietnamese archaeologists had made preliminary arrangements for us to work at Tra Kieu where test pits had already been dug by Nguyen Chieu, Dr Trinh Sinh and Truong Ky in 1990 and 1992. These had shown that there was a reasonable depth of stratified ceramic deposits which the Vietnamese archaeologists believed showed continuity from prehistory into the historic period (Chieu

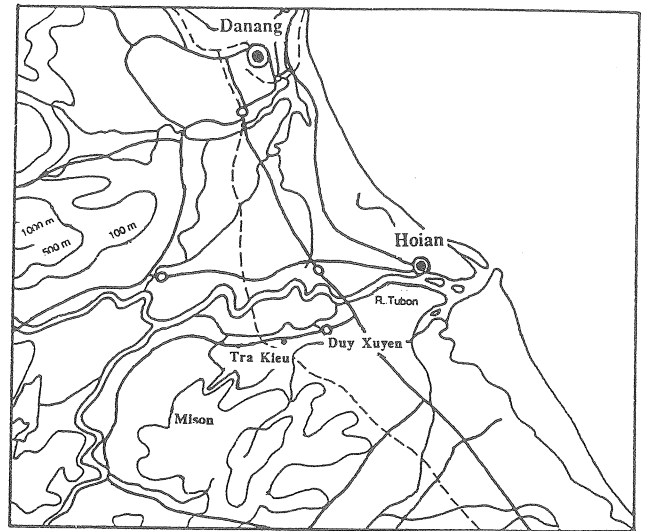


Figure 2: The Thu Bon River Valley, locating Tra Kieu

et al. 1991). Thus, excavations at Tra Kieu seemed to fit well with our general aims, and could, we hoped, provide a test of some of these propositions.

THE EXCAVATION

From 12th February to the 2nd of March 1993 excavation took place at the foot of Buu Chau hill with a team consisting of Dr. Trinh Sinh, Dr. Nguyen Kim Dung, Mr. Nguyen Truong Ky and Mr. Le Dinh Phung, all from the Institute of Archaeology in Hanoi, Mr. Nguyen Chieu of the University of Hanoi, Mr. Ho Xuan Tinh of the Quangnam-Danang Museum and the present authors.

A grid of 8 x 4 metres was laid out in a vegetable garden adjacent to the house of a farmer, Mr. Nguyen Van Tri, who with his three sons worked with us throughout the excavation. The excavation area was soon reduced to 4 x 4 m, then in the lower levels to 2 x 3 m to ensure that in the limited time we had available we could reach the bottom of the 3 metre thick cultural deposit (Figure 4). In the excavation we tried to follow the depositional layers but this was very difficult because of the many disturbances, so we also dug by spits, or arbitrary units approximately 10 cm. thick within thick layers or obviously disturbed levels. Treasure hunters' pits were cleared out separately and depositional layers respected where they could be recognised.

We soon found evidence of very recent disturbances made by local villagers who are convinced that Cham sites are full of gold – and sometimes they do find small

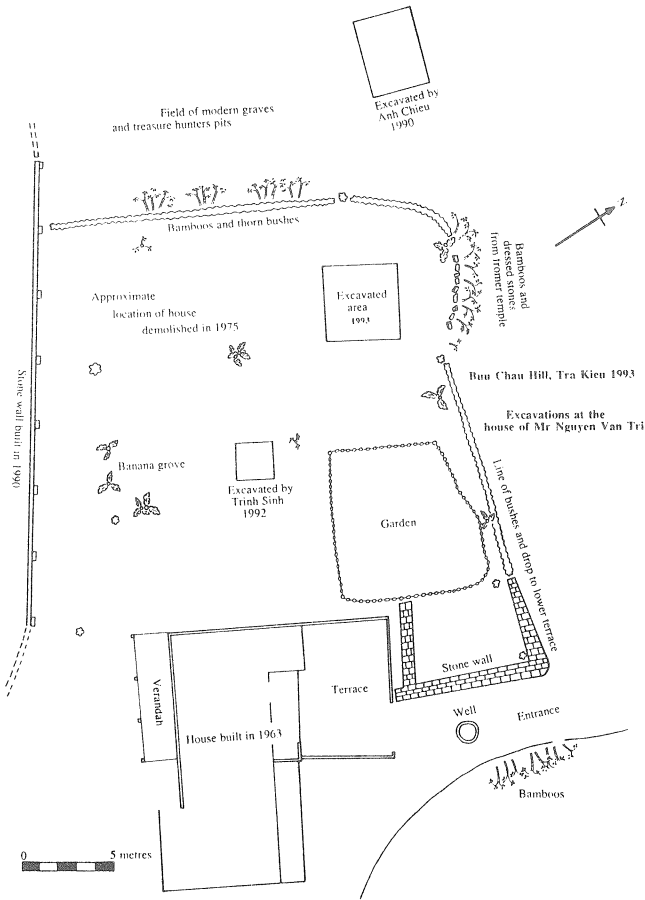


Figure 3: Plan of 1993 excavation area at Buu Chau Hill, Tra Kieu.

gold beads or fragments of gold foil from images or former temple decoration. These disturbances made the upper half of the deposit (Layers 1 and 2) very difficult to resolve. However, the lowest 1 – 1.5 metres of deposit in some areas were relatively free of recent disturbance and we will be able to reconstruct quite a good sequence of pottery for Layers 3-6. The excavation produced over 12,000 sherds., many roof tile fragments and enormous quantities of brick rubble which, in the upper part of the deposit, seem to have been deposited away from the structures from which they came. These materials have also been much disturbed by recent gardening and looting activities. But below a relatively intact brick layer (Feature 7 in Layer 4) at about 1.3 m. below the surface (Figure 5), phases of collapsed building with bricks, tiles and relatively intact pots, interspersed with thick layers of charcoal (Layer 5), indicated that we had remains of

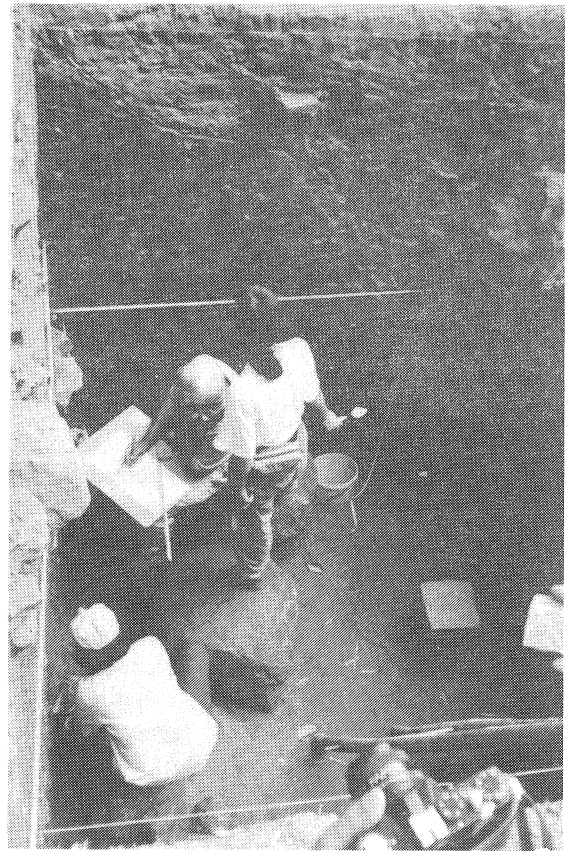


Figure 4: Recording in the excavation trench.

structures burnt and collapsed, then perhaps levelled more or less *in situ* and then built over.

At the very base of the trench, about 2.5 m. below the surface, we encountered seven large natural quartzite boulders arranged in a line roughly east-west, resting on natural colluvial soil (Figure 6). The 2 x 3 m area excavated at the base was too small for us to understand exactly what was the function of this arrangement but it clearly was man-made. In the test pit dug by Mr. Nguyen Chieu in 1990, which is about 10 m northeast of our trench, a line of boulders was also found at the base. Although we have not got the exact plan of the location and orientation of his trench, we suspect that the stones could be linked with those in our trench, and both might have been part of one construction; perhaps to terrace the slope of Buu Chau hill for agriculture or building.

In the upper disturbed 1.3 m. (Layers 1 and 2) (Figure 7) we found nearly 200 sherds of glazed stoneware and

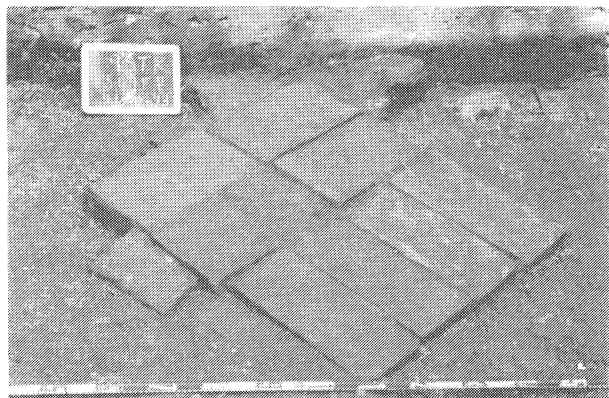


Figure 5: Feature 7, part of an in situ brick floor.

porcelain including many imported glazed Chinese Northern and Southern Song wares, 2 sherds of Japanese 17th century Imari ware, and a small number of later (18th-20th century) Chinese and Vietnamese ceramics. All of these were mixed with the numerous relatively low-fired local ceramics. Below the brick floor (Feature 7) only one, possibly Han Chinese, glazed stoneware sherd was found. The kiln-fired glazed sherds were examined and identified by a group of Japanese and Vietnamese specialists in oriental ceramics who visited our excavation site¹ and were studied in more detail in Hanoi in 1994.

Throughout the deposit, the assemblage of pottery was dominated by earthenwares of rather coarse paste, mainly cord-impressed, sometimes combed or grooved, but rarely with plain surfaces. Most vessels had short, plain everted rims, sharply angled necks and curved bodies. On the other hand, sherds of relatively fine and hard, unglazed, geometrically-stamped jars were also common (Figures 8-10), continuing to the base of the deposit. They have mainly vertical rims, curved bodies and flat bases. The stamped patterns include squares, lozenges and chevrons. Some have one or two horizontal lines and small buttons on their curved shoulders. Besides these, there are fragments from ring-footed and spouted vessels, lids, and fragments of unusually thick and coarse ovoid-based vessels with vertical collar rims, which have diagonal paddle stamping on their surfaces (Figure 11). This pottery is discussed later.

We should also mention the discovery of one small dark grey sherd with lines of triangular impressions from Layer 6 at the base of the deposit (Figure 12). A preliminary field identification suggested that this might be a fragment of an Indo-Roman Rouletted Ware bowl, a ce

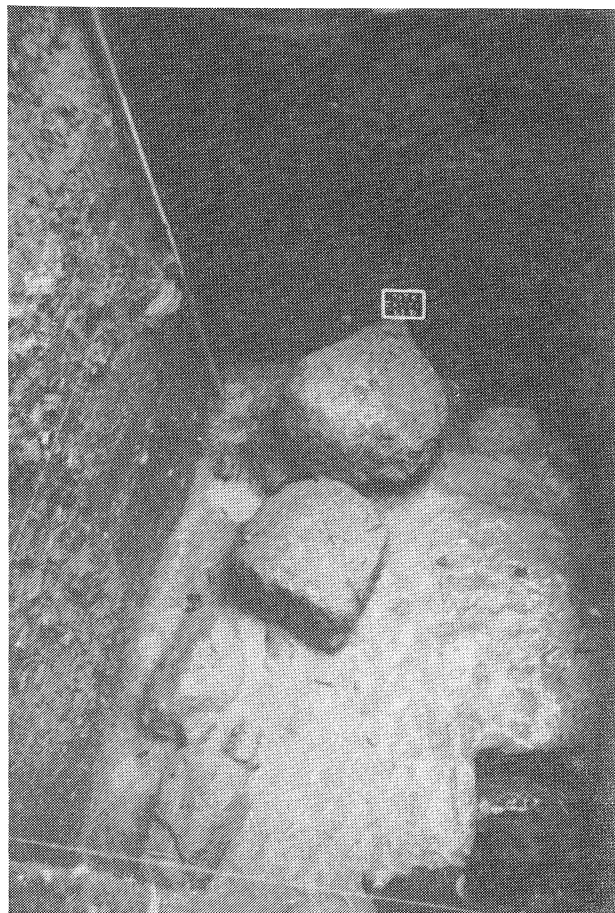


Figure 6: Line of quartzite boulders at base of excavation trench.

ramic type well known from sites such as Arikamedu in eastern India, dating to between the 3rd century BC. and 1st century AD. Similar sherds have recently been excavated at Sembiran in Bali by I Wayan Ardika, and are known from disturbed burials in the Buni Complex near Jakarta in Java (Ardika and Bellwood 1991). A thin-section mineralogical comparison of this sherd by Ruth Prior with ones from Arikamedu and Karaikadu in the collections of the Institute of Archaeology strongly suggests that they come from a single geological and sedimentological environment (Figure 13). Thus our conclusions parallel, although reached through different analytical methods, those made on the relationship between the Rouletted Ware from Bali, South India and Sri Lanka (Ardika *et al.* 1993). Some of the same same sherds from Arikamedu and Karakaidu were used for the analyses in Canberra and London.

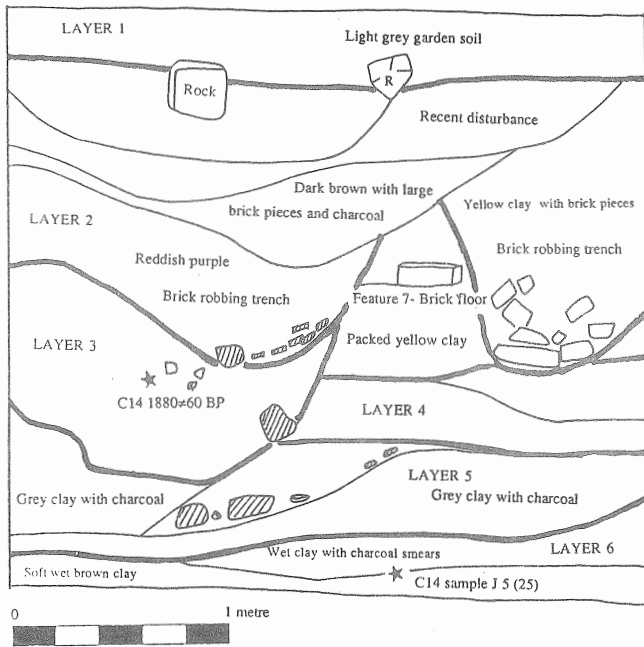
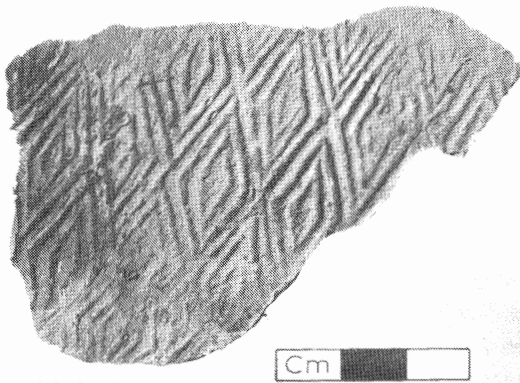
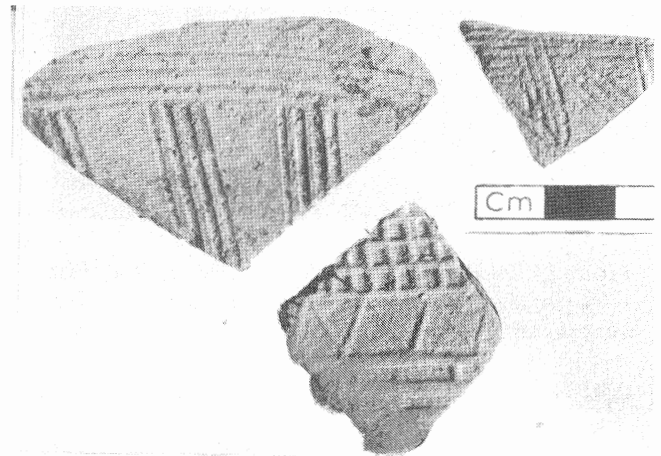
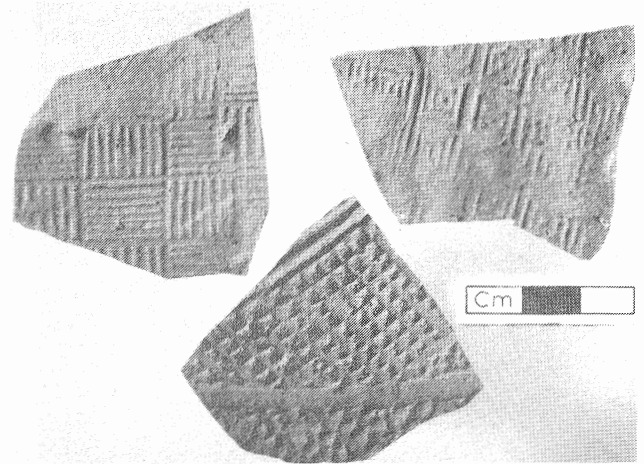


Figure 7: Northeast section of excavation trench.



Figures 8-10: Kiln-fired stamped sherds from Buu Chau, Tra Kieu.

The roof tiles were massive, half-cylindrical in cross-section and some had been held on the roofs with ceramic "nails", a few of which were found in the deposit. Among the tiles were many fragments of moulded end tiles depicting a variety of human faces (Figure 14) which closely resemble some found by Janse (1951) at the Tam Tho kilns near Thanh Hoa. They are basically Han Chinese in form. For comparison we include illus-

trations of Han roof tiles from Vietnam, China and Korea (Figure 15). Other artifacts were rare in the Buu Chau site but include eleven small monochrome glass beads of the common Indo-Pacific Monochrome Drawn Bead category; one piece of a white-on-blue hollow glass eye-bead; fragments of dark blue glass which showed evidence of local working, ten fragments of immature cattle molar teeth and decayed long bone fragments; four small pieces of bronze and one heavily corroded iron socketed tool; many fragments of mica (perhaps from the local quartzite bed rock); one lead ring; a coin of the early 19th century Vietnamese Emperor Gia Long; one baked clay pellet for the once-common Southeast Asian pellet bow; and many fragments of earthenware pottery stoves (Figure 16). The youngest son of Mr Nguyen Van Tri also found a very small rolled gold bead in soil which he had taken from our spoil heap to the river in order to pan for gold.



Figure 11: Paddle-stamped ovoid jar from Buu Chau. This piece was found by villagers during agricultural work, but many sherds of these vessels were found in the excavations.

DATING

We have three radiocarbon dates on charcoal from Layers 3, 5 and 6 in the lower part of the sequence. These are listed first by the conventional radiocarbon age and then calibrated according to the Pretoria Calibration Procedure with a 2 sigma (95%) probability.

Layer 5, I4 (20-22):	1880±60 BP (Beta-63507) –
	cal. AD 75-225.
Layer 3, J4 (15-16):	1720±60 Bp (Beta-63508) –
	cal. AD 210-440.
Layer 6, J5 (25):	2150±70 BP (Beta-74841) –
	cal. 380-1 BC.

There is a small apparent reversal in the samples from Layers 3 and 5 which contain burnt wood from the same series of levelled buildings. However, the dates virtually overlap at the 2 sigma calibration. These dates indicate that the wood used for these structures should be dated to between the 1st and 5th centuries AD. Beta-74841 is a very small sample from clay in the basal Layer 6 collected close to the Rouletted Ware sherd and the 2 sigma calibrated age of 380-1 BC is compatible with the known

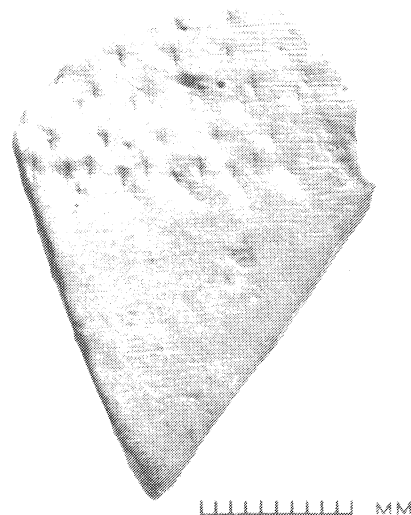


Figure 12: Sherd of dark grey Rouletted Ware from Tra Kieu, Layer 6.

age of this pottery. It gives an approximate age for the beginning of the Tra Kieu sequence.

HAN AND CHAM IN CENTRAL VIETNAM

In 111 BC the plains of Bac Bo were absorbed into the expanding Han Empire and records suggest to some historians that parts of Central Vietnam, including the modern Quangnam-Danang Province, were incorporated into a new Chinese military commandery of Rinan in 3 BC. In the 1st and second centuries AD, however, rebellions by the local inhabitants made the Chinese presence in the south difficult to sustain and following a major uprising between AD 190-193 the southern border of the Empire was stabilised around the Ca River near modern-day Vinh. Further south a local ruler called Kiu Lien established an independent principality which was called Linyi (Lin-i) in the Chinese annals of the Six Dynasties, and is generally identified by recent historians as one of the Indianized kindgoms of Champa. Although often in conflict with the Chinese, Linyi maintained diplomatic relations with the Chinese court until the 8th century. Although Arousseau (1914) argued that Han control at first extended well down the coast of central Vietnam, other commentators, notably Stein (1947-9) using Chinese historical sources, show that Han presence south of

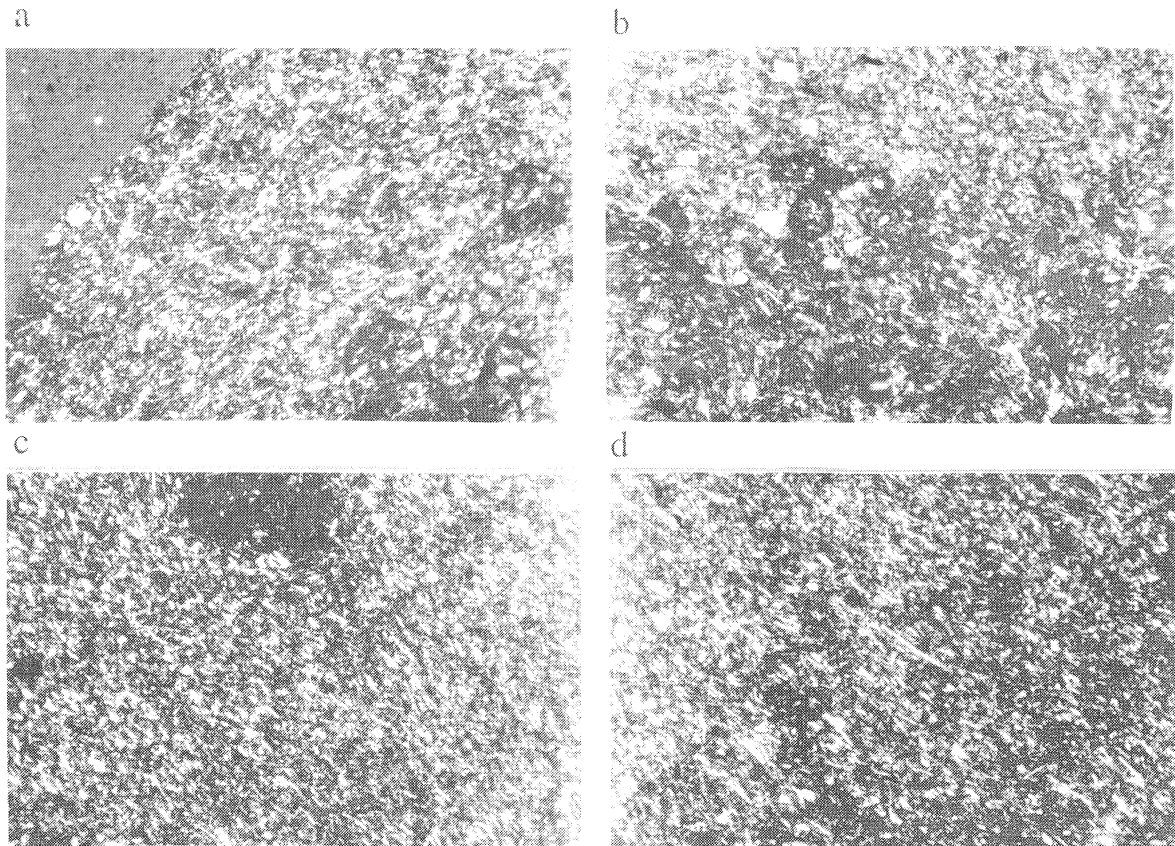


Figure 13: Photomicrographs of thin sections of Rouletted Ware sherds taken in cross-polarised light (XPL) at X10. a) from Buu Chau, Tra Kieu, Vietnam; b) from Karaikadu, South India; c and d) from Arikamedu, South India. The sherds show the same range of micas and could all have come from sherds of a single vessel.

the Ca River and into modern-day Quangnam-Danang Province was minimal.

Tra Kieu in Later Centuries

From the 7th century at least, Tra Kieu grew into a large walled city and is thought to have been Simhapura, a Cham capital which is often mentioned in Chinese accounts. The French archaeologists Parmentier, Maspero and Claeys identified and excavated some temples at the eastern end of Buu Chau hill between 1918 and the 1930s (Claeys 1927, 1928) and many of the stone statues, altar bases, Shiva *lingam* and *yonis* stones and inscriptions they discovered are among the principal exhibits of the Cham Museum at Danang. However, this colonial archaeology was strongly focused towards art history, and the pottery and other small finds was not recorded or kept. It seems clear from the abundant pottery, brick and tiles, and absence of dressed stone and statuary in our excavations

that we were digging at a secular settlement, or at least among ancient buildings other than temples.

CERAMIC COMPARISONS

Here we mention again the kiln-fired stamped sherds from Tra Kieu (Figures 8-10) which show a striking similarity to the stamped vessels found in brick tombs at Lac Truong and from the Tam Tho kilns in Thanh Hoa Province excavated by the Swedish archaeologist Olov Janse in the 1930s. Janse (1951) reports on many stamped jars from these tombs and kilns, although some are glazed, which is not the case at Tra Kieu. Thanh Hoa Province was certainly under the control of the later Han dynasty of the 1st – 3rd centuries AD and this pottery and roof building style is typically Chinese. In addition to the stamped jars, Janse's excavations produced many decorated roof tiles, some decorated with human faces from one of the Tam Tho kilns (Figure 15c). Janse (1951: 243)



Figure 14: A mould-impressed end-tile from the excavations at Buu Chau.

long ago recognised their similarity to decorated tiles recovered by Claeys during his research at Tra Kieu (Figure 15b). We can also find close parallels for these among the material excavated at Buu Chau in 1993.

We do not at the moment put too much chronological reliance on the ceramic parallels without support from mineralogical comparisons because the Chinese stamped pottery tradition lasted a long time and it arose from the the unglazed, geometric-stamped pottery of the earlier Warring States Period in Southern China. However, its links are clearly northern. We must also consider the possibility that the stamped pottery we excavated at Buu Chau had been made at yet undiscovered kilns closer to Tra Kieu; nevertheless the ceramic parallels do fit with the two radiocarbon dates and indicate that the early levels of the Buu Chau site date from the early centuries of the Christian era and show a strong Han Chinese influence, which, according to some views, is exactly the time when the early Champa state emerged on the southern border of the Han Empire.

Here we mention the coarse fabric, cord-impressed ovoid jars found in the earlier levels of the Buu Chau deposit which we mentioned earlier (Figure 11). Nguyen Chieu discovered 1800 sherds of these also at the bottom of his 1990 test pit and is inclined to think that they are derived from Sa Huynh pottery (Chieu *et al* 1991). Although the present authors feel that they do not resemble

any ceramics from the local Sa Huynh jar burials which we have so far seen we are not so familiar with Sa Huynh pottery as are Vietnamese archaeologists and this is a further problem to be investigated.

SUMMARY

Given that the high-fired Han style stamped pottery dates back to the early centuries of the Christian era, and taking into account the radiocarbon dates and the presence of a single Indian Rouletted Ware sherd at the base of the site, we are close to identifying at Buu Chau Hill the "interface" between the prehistoric Sa Huynh culture, early "Indian" contacts, the Han expansion into Central Vietnam, and the early Cham state of Linyi, even if we do not yet understand the relationships between them. The ceramic sequence we have obtained, together with that from Mr. Nguyen Chieu's test pit, will provide a basic chronological standpoint for Cham archaeology. After further study of the materials and the post-excavation work planned for late 1994 we hope to be in a better position to resolve some of the problems highlighted in this short report.

NOTES

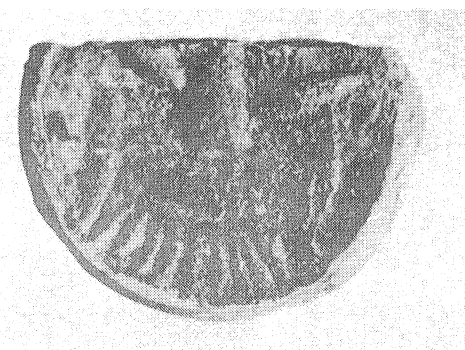
1. These identifications were made in collaboration by Professor Gakuji Hasebe, Director of the Idemitsu Museum of Art; Professor Tadashi Nishitani of Kyushu University; Dr Hiroko Nishida, Curator of the Nezu Institute of Fine Arts; Professor Shiro Momoki of Osaka University; Mr Hidefumi Ogawa of Kokushikan University and Mr Trinh Cao Tuong, Head of the Historical Archaeology Section of the Institute of Archaeology in Hanoi. We are very grateful for their help with this material.

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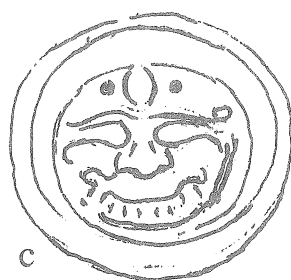
We wish to thank Professor Ha Van Tan, Director of the Institute of Archaeology, Hanoi for facilitating permission to undertake this research; Dr Nguyen Van Binh of the Institute in Hanoi, who helped to make many of the arrangements; our Vietnamese collaborators in the field for their willingness to change many of their normal excavation procedures to humour us; Mr Nguyen Dinh An, Vice President of the People's Committee of the Quangnam-Danang Province; the Quangnam-Danang Provincial Museum and Department of Culture for providing Mr Ho Xuan Tinh to work with us; and Mr Sinh of the Duy Xuyen District Cultural Department. Of Mr Nguyen Van Binh and his family at Tra Kieu who were unfailingly hospitable, gave us free use of their house and cooked most of our meals, we have the fondest memories. The principal funding for the project was provided by the British Academy's Committee for Southeast Asian Stud-



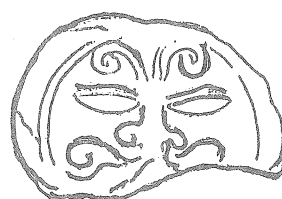
a



b



c



d



e

*Figure 15: Mould-impressed end-tiles:
a) From Buu Chau, Tra Kieu.
b) From the 1920s excavations by Claeys at Tra Kieu.
c) From the Tam Tho kilns, Thanh Hoa.
d) A Han Chinese decorated end-tile.
e) A Han-period end-tile from Korea.*

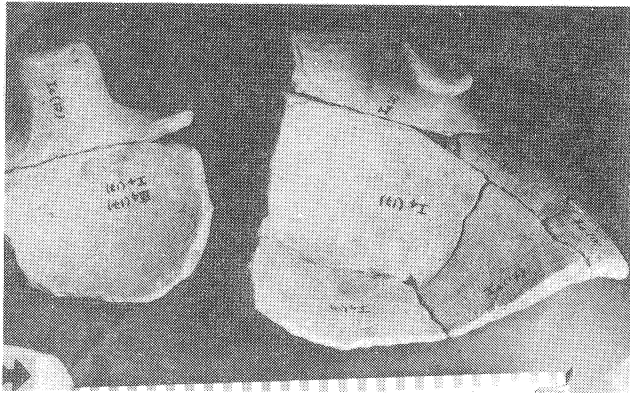


Figure 16: Fragments of a terracotta cooking stove from the excavations at Buu Chau, Tra Kieu.

ies, while William Southworth's participation was made possible by awards from the Central Research Fund of the University of London and the Gordon Childe Fund of the Institute of Archaeology, UCL.

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