



Archaeological
Treasures
from

Vietnam

English booklet

Intro

From the Country of the Rising Dragon

Archaeological Treasures from Vietnam

Vietnam – the country at the coast of Southeast Asia can look back on a long and diverse history. Magnificent jade scepters, mythical creatures made of terracotta and huge bronze drums bear witness of more than 30.000 years of cultural history.

Our knowledge about the past of Vietnam derives mainly from the discoveries of Vietnamese as well as German archaeologists over the last 60 years.

Outstanding artifacts from these excavations invite you to a journey to Far-Eastern ways of living between the Red River in the North and the Mekong in the South. Most of the more than 300 exhibits have never left the country before, among them objects from impressive UNESCO world heritage sites as the temple city Mỹ Sơn located in the jungle of Central Vietnam, and the imperial palace of Thăng Long (“Rising Dragon”) in Hanoi.

“Archaeological Treasures from Vietnam” is the first exhibition about the archaeology and history of Vietnam in Germany.

1

Gatherers & Farmers

From the beginnings to the 2nd millennium BC

Hunters, Gatherers and Farmers

Jäger, Sammler und Bauern

The Stone Age in Vietnam

More than a million years ago, the first humans entered Southeast Asia. The most ancient artifacts found in Vietnam that can be dated with certainty are around 30 000 years old. They were recovered from caves or abris and show that early man in Vietnam survived as a hunter and gatherer. Evidence from after 5 000 BC shows that people were becoming sedentary. They produced ceramic vessels and polished stoneaxes, their settlement sites are marked by layers of refuse, and their dead were buried in extensive cemeteries.

The Later Stone Age began in the 3rd millennium BC as immigrants from the north joined the local hunters and gatherers. This population began to practice agriculture and raise cattle. The burials of the era show that this economic revolution also led to social change.

Fragments and Exploration

Bruchstückhaft erforscht

The Early Stone Age in Vietnam

It is not clear when the ancestors of modern man moved into Vietnam. It is also difficult to define the environment and the circumstances in which early modern man survived here. After the last glacial period, the sea level rose more than 120 meters, covering a substantial part of the landscape which would have been most attractive to hunters and gatherers. On the other hand, sites may also rest undetected in the jungle covering the highlands.

Preserved organic material from the Early Stone Age is extremely rare. Unfortunately, many objects for everyday use would have been made from

bamboo, wood or other plant resources. Some 230 sites with finds of stone tools from the Early Stone Age are known, with more than two thirds lying in the northern part of the country and the remainder in the central regions. The oldest of these artifacts, which were fashioned from pebbles, have been dated by scientific analysis to c. 30 000 years before our time.

The Grave of a Shaman?

Bestattung eines Schamanen?

The Xóm Rền burial

In 2006, local residents digging the ground at Xóm Rền found a number of objects made from nephrite (an ornamental stone resembling jade), of whom a selection is presented here. A subsequent excavation identified the site as an extremely rare burial from the Late Stone Age. No bones were found, but the objects indicate that an important person must have been laid to rest here. While the bracelets and a bead necklace could have been produced locally, the nephrite sceptres may have been brought to Xóm Rền from Southern China. They would have served their owner (who was probably a male shaman) as status symbols.

Raw Material No. 1

Rohstoff Nr. 1!

Bamboo – a real jack-of-all-trades

With the exception of Europe, bamboo is found naturally on all continents. Throughout its geographic range, it is considered a particularly versatile raw material. Most of its 1500 species are fast-growing, extremely hard and highly elastic.

In the countryside of Vietnam, houses are built entirely of bamboo, and in cities, bamboo poles are still used to make building scaffolds. Furniture and household objects such as baskets, brooms or ladders can be made from bamboo just as easily as bridges, tools and weapons. Musical instruments such as the Angklung, a kind of xylophone, are another popular product. Traditional medicine employs a powder ground from parts of the plant, and bamboo sprouts are considered a delicacy all over the world.

The close affinity of the Vietnamese to this versatile member of the *poaceae* family of grasses is expressed by an old saying: “The bamboo is my brother”.

Society in Turmoil

Gesellschaft im Umbruch

The Late Stone Age in Vietnam

New population groups pushed into Vietnam from the north around 2500 BC. They were farmers who cultivated rice and millet, domesticated pigs and dogs, and made decorated storage vessels from clay. They preferred the alluvial soil of the river valleys and coastal plains for their settlements. In time, the indigenous hunters and gatherers would also adopt this agricultural way of life. From the 2nd millennium BC, there are indications that buffalo or cattle were also being domesticated, and chicken and elephants as well.

This new mode of subsistence also changed society. This is clearly shown by significant differences in the wealth of burials. An impressive example is provided by the rich grave from Xóm Rền, whose elaborate ornaments and cult objects carved from nephrite must have belonged to a person of high rank.

The Cave of Hang Hùm, 1964

Hang Hùm-Höhle, 1964

GDR scientists on a jungle expedition

When the planned construction of a dam threatened to destroy an Ice-Age site in the jungle on the Red River, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam asked the German Democratic Republic for help. A scientific expedition was dispatched to Northern Vietnam from Weimar, led by Hans-Dietrich Kahlke, a paleontologist and archaeologist. The joint German-Vietnamese expedition was able to document, for the first time in this region, substantial remains of Ice-Age vertebrates – and even found teeth of early *Homo sapiens* in the cave of Hang Hùm.

The team came well equipped with not only their tools, a generator and personal kit, but also Hungarian salami, instant coffee, condensed milk und toilet paper.

Another expedition which was scheduled to leave Weimar for Burma in the late 1960s was to be similarly equipped. This venture was cancelled on short notice, however. The packed crates were stowed away in the Expedition Station for Quaternary Paleontology, where they have been preserved to this day.

2

Bronze founders

End of the 2nd millennium BC to the 4th century BC

More than Just a New Raw Material

Mehr als nur ein neuer Rohstoff

The Bronze Age in Vietnam

By the end of the 2nd millennium BC, the Bronze Age had begun in Southeast Asia. The new material, an alloy of copper and tin, was at first used to manufacture weapons and small tools. At the same time, special types of stone such as nephrite or jade remained very popular for fashioning ornaments. Spindle whorls are proof that people were beginning to produce textiles from spun yarn. In Gò Ô Chùa in Southern Vietnam, archaeologists discovered an extensive salt processing center which operated between 1000 and 500 BC. Salt was necessary for conserving and seasoning all kinds of food.

During the Bronze Age, the coastline of Vietnam gradually came to resemble its modern outline. The new plains emerging behind the receding seashore provided more space for rice cultivation and larger settlements with houses which were raised on wooden posts. The rich imagery on objects made of bronze or clay shows that the concepts of ancestor worship and a transition of the dead to an afterlife were becoming more complex.

Smelting, Casting and New Products

Schmelzen, Gießen, neue Formen

Bronze casting in Dốc Chùa

Bronze production was introduced to Vietnam at the end of the 2nd millennium BC through different channels. In the north, it arrived from South China, and in the south, it came from the northeastern part of Thailand. A center of southern bronze production was discovered in Dốc Chùa (or “Slope of the Pagoda”). Apart from burials and settlement traces, a large number of finds such as spindle whorls and casting molds were also found at this site. The craftsmen

used multi-part molds made from clay or stone to cast diverse bronze tools, weapons, vessels, jewelry or instruments. The production of axes, heads for lances and spears, tips for arrows, chisels, fish hooks, small bells and much more is attested by finds from Dốc Chùa.

Rich in Stones

Steinreich

Jewelry workshops in Đồng Đậu

Đồng Đậu (“The Beanfield”), one of the most significant sites of the Early Bronze Age in Northern Vietnam, has been explored by archaeologists since 1962. Its occupation layers are more than three meters deep and have yielded a mass of ceramic vessels and objects made from stone, bone and bronze.

The people who lived here from c. 1500 to 500 BC cultivated rice, hunted, made artifacts and buried their dead. But above all, the find site is renowned for its excellent stone jewelry production. In spite of the new demand for bronze objects, the craftsmen of Đồng Đậu rose to the challenge and created masterful pieces of nephrite jewelry.

Fire and (Sea-)Water

Feuer und (Meer)wasser

Salt production in Gò Ô Chùa

Some 3000 years ago, a large-scale production of salt was thriving in Gò Ô Chùa (“Pagoda Hill”) in Southern Vietnam. This is clearly indicated by more than 130 000 fragments of ceramic supports found here during excavations. Three earth mounds on the site are estimated to contain the remains of another two million of these objects.

Salt water was boiled in vats placed on these clay supports, until the water had evaporated and only the salt residue remained. The briny seawater was probably transported to the site in boats. Unlike today, the seashore was much closer to Gò Ô Chùa during the Bronze Age. The surrounding area also provided an abundance of firewood and clay deposits, and was protected from floods and enemies.

This largest known salt-production site in Southeast Asia presumably came to an end some 2400 years ago when the wood from the area had been used up or the sand deposited by the Mekong had pushed the shoreline out of reach.

3

Drums

4th century BC to 1st century AD

Following the Drum

Im Zeichen der Trommel

The Đông Sơn Culture of the Iron Age in Northern Vietnam

They were true masters of bronze casting, traded widely by sea and buried their rulers and proven military leaders in boat graves. They were the people behind the Đông Sơn Culture. And as they left no written records of their own, archaeologists named them after an extensive find province on the river Mã in Northern Vietnam. The Chinese to the north knew them as “Lac Viet” and numbered them among the “One Hundred Barbarian Tribes” of the south.

The highly specialised Đông Sơn craftsmen worked under the protection of powerful chieftains to fashion huge bronze drums as well as finely decorated vessels and weapons. Rice cultivation was now made more effective and productive by new tools such as plows. Extensive burial sites indicate an increase in population and settlement concentrations along the great rivers of Northern Vietnam, which were to remain the main traffic arteries until modern times.

At first, intensive trade and peaceful exchange dominated the contacts with the related cultures of what is today known as Southern China. But from around 100 BC, incursions by the northern neighbors could no longer be fought off. By the middle of the 1st century AD, the Đông Sơn Culture had been incorporated into the Chinese Empire.

A Mighty Bulwark against the North

Mächtiges Bollwerk gegen den Norden

The Citadel of Cổ Loa

Since 1959, archaeologists have been investigating a fortification site near Hanoi called Cổ Loa (“Ancient Snail Citadel”). This turned out to be the oldest known fortress in Vietnam. The remains of three moats, of towers, gates and interior buildings were found to date to the 3rd century BC. This was a period when the people of the Red River delta region were increasingly forced to defend themselves against the incursions of Chinese rulers. A mass of weapon finds from the Citadel underlines this impression.

Written sources mention a King An Dương (“The Pacifier of the South”) who founded a kingdom called Âu Lạc in 257 BC by uniting the elites of the Chinese border region (Âu) with the clan chieftains of the Red River delta (Lạc). But the power of the northern neighbors proved overwhelming: In 207 BC, the realm lost its independence and was absorbed into a kingdom known as Nam Việt (Nan Yuê), which was supported by the Chinese Han Dynasty.

Đông Sơn, 1924

Đông Sơn, 1924

The Call of the Drum

For more than a hundred years, the name “Đông Sơn” has been renowned both within and beyond the specialist circles of archaeologists. It was actually the first find site in Southeast Asia to attain international fame. In 1924, a local fisherman had delivered a great number of bronze objects of exceptional quality to the illegal art market. When the director of the *École française d’Extrême-Orient* heard of this, he decided to have the location of these finds examined. He sent Louis Pajou, a French customs officer, to Đông Sơn. During

his excavations, Pajou uncovered countless burials containing rich grave goods made of bronze. The site was to eventually give its name to an entire culture.

Further excavations of this locale were carried out by Vietnamese archaeologists after 1961. Unique among the finds were drums made of cast bronze, lavishly decorated with relief depictions. They have since become a symbol of the fascinating and exotic archaeological heritage of Vietnam. To this day, more than 250 of these drums have been discovered in Vietnam, with many more turning up as far as Western Thailand and East Timor.

4th century BC to 1st century AD

Buried with a View of the Sea

Bestattet mit Meerblick

The Sa Huỳnh Culture of the Iron Age in Central Vietnam

On the coast and along the rivers of Central Vietnam, archaeologists have discerned an ancient culture which differs from others in its ornamental wealth and burial customs: the Sa Huỳnh Culture. Many of its substantial burial sites were situated on seaside sand dunes. Here, the dead were buried in large ceramic vessels in a squatting posture. They were accompanied by exceptional jewelry which included beads of glass and carnelian as well as ear ornaments decorated with animal heads. The latter were obviously reserved for a few male burials.

The oldest gold finds of Vietnam were found in Giong Cá Vo. They are clear evidence that the people of the Sa Huỳnh Culture maintained maritime trade contacts with Thailand and Malaysia. Apart from the Sa Huỳnh Culture, there were other cultural groups in Central Vietnam which buried their dead in large ceramic vessels. The unusual burials of Hòa Diêm are an interesting example. Here, archaeologists identified the bones of up to six corpses in some vessels. It is likely that the freshly deceased were first buried in the ground and their bones recovered at a later date for a second funeral in a vessel. In addition, the

ceramic ware and jewelry of this group differ from those of the Sa Huỳnh Culture. Scientists assume that the different cultural groups using these vessel burials may have descended from common ancestors who had lived in the high plains of Central Vietnam, where this particular burial custom had already been practised in the Stone Age.

Far from the Center

Weit weg vom Zentrum

Giồng Cá Vồ – The Sa Huỳnh Culture in South Vietnam

Far from the core area of the Sa Huỳnh Culture, a burial site of this culture was investigated in the 1990s to the southeast of Ho-Chi-Minh-City, on the bay of Vũng Tàu. The 350 burials were made up of 338 burial vessels and twelve inhumation graves.

The exceptional finds include a ceramic stove of the kind used to this day in Southern Vietnam, and ear ornaments with terminals in the shape of animal heads. These are supposed to depict a species which has only recently been re-discovered, the Sao La (Latin: *Pseudorix nghetinhensis*). Persons who were buried wearing such ornaments are often identified as shamans. And finally, the site yielded a large number of small ornaments, most of them made from thin gold foil. These are actually the oldest gold objects from South Vietnams.

Lai Nghi

Lai Nghi

German-Vietnamese excavations uncover exotic jewelry

A French customs officer first discovered an assemblage of large funerary vessels in the vicinity of Sa Huỳnh village in 1909. These contained grave goods and human bones. Since then, Vietnamese archaeologists have unearthed

more than 40 sites here. They are now known to belong to the so-called Sa Huỳnh Culture of Central Vietnam.

A three-year campaign of excavation which began in Lai Nghi in 2002 turned out to be particularly rewarding. Vietnamese and German archaeologists worked together to uncover 63 burials. These were furnished with more than 10 000 ornamental beads made from a variety of exotic materials such as glass, gold, carnelian, agate, rock crystal and nephrite. The beads were not distributed among the burials in an even manner. Some individual graves had more than 3 000, while others had been provided with as few as five. One exceptional carnelian bead was shaped like a lion. This indicates that the contacts of the people of Lai Nghi reached all the way to India. Other finds include the remains of two Chinese bronze mirrors and a set of grave goods consisting of six Chinese bronze vessels – the largest number ever to be discovered in Southeast Asia in a grave outside of China.

4th century BC to 1st century AD

Flight and Migration

Flucht und Migration

The cultural groups of the Iron Age in Southern Vietnam

When the Chinese of the Han Dynasty invaded Northern Vietnam at the end of the 2nd century BC, a substantial part of the population fled southward, taking their belongings, their ideas and their way of life with them. These events are mirrored in the find site of Phú Chánh in Southern Vietnam. Between 1995 and 2003, archaeologists discovered ten burials belonging to an elite northern group here. They form one of the most spectacular find complexes of the Iron Age in all of Southeast Asia. Apart from bronze drums which were made in the Red River delta, and objects of Chinese provenance, organic finds have been particularly well preserved in the waterlogged, boggy ground. These included vessels and tools as well as parts of wooden instruments for weaving.

The burial site of Gò Ô Chùà, only 100 kilometers away, tells quite a different story: After the salt-producing population of the Bronze Age had left this region, it was occupied by new arrivals from the 4th century BC on. They buried their dead in the debris mounds of their predecessors. They had probably come from a remote back-country region, bringing with them both iron objects and a cultural set which differed markedly from that of the earlier population. Not a single object originating in the north of Vietnam or the Chinese Empire was found in their burials. This may be taken as clear evidence that the area was abandoned by its former inhabitants at the end of the 2nd century BC, before the northern population began their exodus in the face of Chinese occupation.

4

Boat burial

The National Treasures of Vietnam

Reiche Kultur

Preserving a rich culture

Since 2012, Vietnam has protected its archaeological and cultural heritage by registering outstanding objects in a list of national cultural treasures. The first archaeological find to be accepted into this selection (in October 2012) was the drum of Ngoc Lũ. The richly furnished boat grave of Viet Khê followed in 2013. More than 100 objects have been added to the list since.

A permit issued by the Vietnamese head of state is necessary when any such cultural treasure is requested as a loan for an exhibition abroad. The loan of individual objects from the boat grave of Viet Khê in 2016 was only made possible through the Cultural Preservation Programme of the Foreign Office of the Federal Republic of Germany. The objects were brought to Germany primarily for conservation and had to be accompanied by Vietnamese conservators. Only in this context was a permit given for the subsequent loan of the complete burial ensemble for our exhibition “Archaeological Treasures from Vietnam” in Herne, Chemnitz und Mannheim.

The Boat Grave of Việt Khê

Das Bootsgrab von Việt Khê

Grave goods from the richest burial of the Iron Age in Southeast Asia

In 1961, some residents of Việt Khê stumbled on an archaeological sensation while digging in the ground: They uncovered a 2000-year-old boat containing more than 100 find objects – the remains of a burial of the Đông Sơn Culture.

The deceased had obviously been wrapped in a woven mat and laid in a boat made from ironwood which was to serve as his coffin. He was accompanied by more than 90 bronze artifacts, which constitute the typical male kit of the

highest social levels: weapons, tools, washing and serving vessels, as well as musical instruments. Some organic remains had also survived: These included a painted wooden chest which contained many of the smaller bronze objects, a paddle, the remains of leather armor or a shield, plus some spear shafts of more than two meters length.

Many of these objects are of regional provenance, but some were clearly imported from Southern China. Could the deceased have been an indigenous clan chief who enjoyed good northern contacts? Or maybe a high-ranking military commander from the north with close ties to the local elite?

5

Buddha

2nd to 7th century AD

Trading with the Wide World

Handel mit der weiten Welt

The Óc Eo Culture in the delta of the Mekong River

In the 2nd century AD, a substantial kingdom arose in the delta region of the Mekong River, called “Funan” in Chinese written sources. Archaeologists have named this entity the Óc Eo Culture, after an important find site which French scientists examined in the 1940s.

Since then, the remains of sizeable buildings and settlement layers belonging to this culture have been discovered throughout the Mekong Delta. Finds of gold pendants and imitation Roman coins minted in India allow the conclusion that from the 2nd through 6th centuries AD, the people of Óc Eo-maintained contacts with India and far beyond, even with the ancient cultures of the Mediterranean world. The trade connections to South Asia reach back into the pre-Christian centuries, but they increased as Buddhism and Hinduism took root in Southern Vietnam.

Óc Eo was definitely a major emporium where the goods of the maritime trade could be exchanged for the products of the interior. These included elephants, ivory, rhino horns, feathers, lacquer, aromatic woods and spices. The most coveted luxury goods were gold, silver and silk. The Funan kingdom flourished into the first half of the 7th century. It would eventually be absorbed into the Southeast Asian polity known as “Chenla”, which successfully kept its neighbors to the south and west at bay and conquered the realm of the Cham, piece by piece.

After an economic and cultural flowering at the end of the 15th century, Đai Viet split into a northern and southern part until the beginning of the 19th century. These polities were engaged in constant conflict with one another, but in 1802, the Nguyen Dynasty was able to reunite the country – only to lose its independence to the ascendant French colonial power in the 1860s.

Between Cultures

Zwischen den Kulturen

The temple complex of Cát Tiên

This Hindu temple city, which covers a number of hills deep in the jungle of Southern Vietnam, was only discovered by archaeologists in 1984. They managed to uncover the brick foundations of diverse temples, altars and shrines which can be dated to the 4th to 8th centuries AD.

Some of the finds are closely related to the Óc Eo Culture some 100 kilometers further south. The architecture, on the other hand, is reminiscent of the temples built by the Cham, such as Mỹ Sơn in Central Vietnam. The sheer number of gold votive offerings is sensational. These were mostly found inside the shrines. Scientists are expecting a wealth of information from the analysis of the finds, allowing them to reconstruct the network of contacts of the inhabitants.

Gò Tháp

Gò Tháp

A religious center of the Óc Eo Culture

On the flood plain of the Mekong River lies the site of Gò Tháp, the “Temple Mound”. This prominent elevation was a refuge for the people of the surrounding area during rainy seasons. By the 6th century, it had evolved into a major religious center of the Óc Eo Culture, which lasted into the 10th century AD. Only few traces remain of the brick and tile buildings of the temple complex, but there are numerous finds of votive offerings for shrines of the Hindu religion.

The great number of wooden figures of Buddha which archaeologists have discovered in Gò Tháp is a unique feature. Recent analyses of the wood have confirmed that the statues being produced here in as early as the 2nd century AD. This proves that Buddhism had already taken root in Southern Vietnam during the founding phase of the Funan kingdom.

6

Temples in the jungle

2nd to 15th century AD

Gods, Temples and Pirates

Götter, Tempel und Piraten

The realm of the Cham

Chinese sources mention an invasion of the Empire's southernmost province in 192 AD by a state called Linyi. Many scientists equate this "state" with a collection of petty kingdoms which were the forerunners of the Cham kingdom. They were centered on the ports in the river mouths of Central Vietnam which thrived from the 4th through 15th centuries.

The question of who the Cham actually were remains unresolved. What is clear is that they were a branch of the Malay-Polynesian language family who used the Indian Sanskrit script for writing. Many archaeologists see the Iron Age Sa Huỳnh Culture as a local precursor of the Cham. Culturally, the Cham were strongly influenced by India, as evidenced by their adoption of Hindu religious concepts and art. Many magnificent temple complexes were dedicated to Shiva the destroyer.

The Cham were a seafaring people with contacts to Arabia, India and China. But as pirates and slavers, they were also the scourge of the South China Sea. Conflicts with neighboring states were inevitable: The Cham waged wars against the Khmer kings to their west, and against the Chinese to the north. When the Tang Dynasty declined at the beginning of the 10th century, the elites of Northern Vietnam grasped the opportunity and founded an independent polity called Đại Việt. This state was eventually to destroy the realm of the Cham in the 15th century.

A UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Site

UNESCO Weltkulturerbe

Mỹ Sơn – A temple city of the Cham deep in the Vietnamese jungle

The Cham built their largest temple complex at Mỹ Sơn, in a valley surrounded by mountains and rivers. From the 4th through 14th centuries, this Hindu sanctuary, whose buildings were grouped around a sacred hill, was constantly expanded and renewed.

At first, the shrines were small pagodas of wood, with some divine symbol housed inside. The Hindu god Shiva and his manifestations were particularly revered here, but Vishnu and the ancestors of the Cham rulers as well. From the 7th century on, the Cham began to construct their temples from bricks. The layers of brick were stacked closely, leaving minimal joints, and possibly bonded with glue made from tree resin. Beautiful reliefs were carved into these walls, contrasting with sculptures and reliefs carved from sandstone.

At its greatest extension, the complex encompassed eight temple precincts with more than 70 buildings. Due to general decay and the American aerial bombings of 1969, only about 20% of the structures remain. Mỹ Sơn was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1999. Several international teams of experts are now fighting to stop the further decay of this most important Cham sanctuary.

Faith and Architecture

Glaube und Architektur

The temples of the Cham

The Cham built their temple complexes according to a standard plan. The sacred precinct was entered through a pavilion (*gopura*) which was set into the encircling wall (*antarmandala*). The main temple (*kalan*), which was usually oriented on an east-west axis, stood at the center. The *kalan* housed the main cult image and could sometimes be as high as 25 meters. It would often be surrounded by smaller shrines in which the faithful paid homage to lesser deities.

The treasury (*kosagrha*) was usually open to the southwest. Here, the Cham priests would store their ritual implements and the sacred scriptures. A small roofed shrine (*posha*) was used to protect the stone on which the founding inscription of the temple complex was carved. Outside the encircling walls, and directly across from the entrance pavilion, stood a large assembly hall (*mandapa*). The sacrificial ceremonies in honor of the gods usually began here

Each detail of the temple complexes mirrored some aspect of the Hindu faith which the Cham followed. The stepped pyramid shape of the main temple was a small-scale representation of Mount Meru, the cosmic mountain. The square base of the temple stood for the material world, while the main body represented the spiritual sphere and the pyramid-shaped roof the sphere of the gods.

Cult Images of the Gods

Kultbilder der Götter

Carved in stone

The Cham were master sculptors. Initially, wood was their preferred material for carving images of the gods and for ornamenting temples. In the 7th century, they began to use bricks for construction and sandstone for sculptures. The Cham craftsmen would first build the entire structure of the temple from fired bricks, and then carve reliefs and sculptures into the finished walls. The nooks and corners of the temple were decorated with sculptures carved from more durable sandstone.

The center of each main temple was occupied by the image of the deity which was revered here. This too was usually carved from sandstone. Cham imagery was strongly influenced by Hindu India, but the sculptors also took inspiration from their indigenous environment for artistic details. Thus, the bodies and clothing of their sculptures were those of their countrymen, and their natural surroundings provided models for decorative elements. This resulted in a unique style which combined Indian traditions and local peculiarities.

Mỹ Sơn, 1902/1903

Mỹ Sơn, 1902/1903

Fighting oblivion with a draughtsman's pen

Camille Paris, a French colonial officer, discovered the ruins of Mỹ Sơn in 1889 while building a telegraph line through the jungle of Central Vietnam. Mỹ Sơn became the destination of the first scientific expedition organised by the *École française d'Extrême-Orient*. Led by Henri Parmentier, a team of experts on architectural history from France set out in 1902 and 1903 to not only find the temple monuments of the Cham people, but to catalogue, measure and draw them. The expedition was able to identify some 70 buildings which Parmentier, an exceptional scientist, published in his two-volume work "*Inventaire Descriptif des Monuments Chams de l'Annam*" in 1909 and 1918. Parmentier's high-quality architectural drawings are a priceless source, as 80% of the original temple site was irretrievably destroyed by US bombing raids in 1969.

Since then, teams of archaeologists and architects from Poland, Vietnam and Italy have been fighting to save what remains of the temples from further destruction. In 1999, Mỹ Sơn was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

7

Chinese reign

2nd century BC to 10th century AD

The Age of Chinese Occupation and Vietnamese Resistance

Periode des Widerstandes gegen China

The Chinese Empire and the northern part of Vietnam

In 111 BC, troops of Emperor Wu of the Chinese Han Dynasty conquered the region of the Red River all the way to the Ocean Cloud Pass in Central Vietnam. The land was divided into three provinces. A new administrative center was founded at Luy Lâu in Giao Chi province, in order to convince the indigenous population, called the Lac Viet, to adopt Chinese culture, laws, taxation, as well as the religious tenets of Buddhism and Confucianism.

At first, the local princes were able to retain some measure of independence. But after several revolts, such as the legendary popular uprising led by the Trưng sisters, China despatched a large number of military settlers to Vietnam. The indigenous population now adopted many of the cultural achievements of the northern neighbors, but retained its own language. By 679 AD, the Chinese believed the region to be so totally subdued that they started calling it “*Ān Nám*” (“The Pacified South”).

But at the end of the 9th century AD, the Chinese Empire of the Tang Dynasty gradually fell apart. In 938, a Vietnamese General called Ngô Quyền succeeded in destroying a Chinese fleet in a decisive battle on the river Bạch Đằng. This victory opened the way for an independent Vietnam.

From Pictures to Characters

Vom Bild zum Zeichen

The evolution of the Chinese script

Chinese script is the oldest writing developed in East Asia. Its origins go back to the 18th century BC. Evolving from a group of pictorial scripts, it was simplified to create a standard style in the 3rd century BC, after China had been unified into an empire.

The characters consist of 1 to 64 strokes. These are drawn in a given sequence. The meaning of the characters is the same whatever the language or pronunciation of the user. This allowed the Chinese script to be used beyond the borders of the Empire, in Korea, Japan and Vietnam. There are some 106 000 characters in all, which can be used to express 123 000 words. Of these, around 10 000 remain in use today, and 6 000 are considered necessary to comfortably read a newspaper.

From around the 13th century, the Vietnamese used a variation of the Chinese script which was developed by scholars. Today, Vietnamese is written with Latin letters with the addition of diacritic signs.

Luy Lâu

Luy Lâu

A citadel of the Chinese overlords

The Han Chinese founded the citadel of Luy Lâu in the delta region of the Red River as the capital of their newly-conquered province of Giao Chỉ. The use of the Chinese Han script spread from this cultural and political center, and Buddhism gained a first foothold on Vietnamese soil as Indian monks stopped here on their way to China. Since 1969, the excavations in Luy Lâu have supplied a number of intriguing insights into the occupation period which lasted from the 1st to 10th centuries AD. A double rampart of earth surrounded the

rectangular center of this largest and oldest city in Northern Vietnam. To the east of the citadel, archaeologists discovered the largest cemetery with Chinese-style brick graves in Northern Vietnam, while remains of bronze workshops uncovered in the interior of the citadel obviously continued the tradition of the indigenous Đông Sơn Culture. In Luy Lâu, cultural traits of the indigenous population intermingled with those of their Chinese overlords.

8

Rising dragon

10th to 19th century AD

The Rising Dragon

Der aufsteigende Drache

The realm of Dai Viet and the struggle of for independence

When the Vietnamese general Ngô Quyền planted sharpened stakes in the bed of the Bạch Đằng River to sink a Chinese fleet in 938, his stratagem brought a thousand years of Chinese dominion over Northern Vietnam to an end. But it would take many more years for a stable state to evolve from this opportunity. The first seat of an independent government was at Cổ Loa, which had already been a power center before the Chinese invasion. The capital was later moved to Hoa Lư, which was better protected by surrounding mountains.

The first ruler of the Lý Dynasty, Lý Thái Tổ, relocated his seat to the banks of the Red River in 1010, naming his city Thăng Long (“Rising Dragon”). His realm was known in the 11th century as Đại Việt (“Greater Viet”). Chinese aggression was successfully repelled under this and the following dynasties. Still, China remained the definite role model for Đại Việt where its political system, architecture, culture und philosophy were concerned.

The Seats of Power

Orte der Macht

Palaces, temples and barracks

The center of the Vietnamese realm lay at Thăng Long, which was magnificently endowed as the capital city. But when the short-lived Hồ Dynasty relocated the seat of government to their home region further south on the River Cửu, they ordered an entire new city to be built here. From 1397, palaces, barracks, temples and a unique square fortification of huge stone blocks were raised through extraordinary efforts in a very short span of time.

Throughout the country, the power of ruling families manifested itself in fortified bases and public buildings. Walled cities, border posts and barracks secured the realm against attacks from the outside and uprisings from within. Emperors founded a great number of temples, which not only helped to document their piety and cement the structure of society, but also provided venues where officials for the state were trained. These substantial buildings, which generally followed the Chinese architectural tradition, served to commemorate rulers as great founders and benefactors.

Thăng Long

Thăng Long

The emperor and his dragon palace

According to legend, a dragon rising from the water showed Emperor Lý Thái Tổ where to found his new capital in 1010. This story also gave the emperor's citadel its name: Thăng Long ("Rising Dragon"). The Chinese had already had a fortified base here, occupying the strategic location where the delta of the Red River began to spread out. This was now expanded to provide a seat for the new ruler.

It consisted of a palace complex enclosed by walls, and an adjoining city with several temples. For centuries to come, the Temple of Literature, near the seat of the ruler, served as a university for training state officials.

For a long time, wood was the main material used for both construction and frequent renewals of buildings. Of these, only the stone foundations are preserved, along with remains of terracotta tiles from their elaborate roofs. Additional information on everyday life in the palace is provided by the millions of find objects which were recovered during the extensive excavations of recent years. The location was declared a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Site in 2010.

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Shipwreck

Sunken Treasure

Versunkene Schätze

The Cù Lao Chàm wreck

In 1990 a Vietnamese fisherman made an unusual catch near the Cù Lao Chàm Islands, consisting of ancient porcellain objects.

After these and further finds had begun to swamp the illegal art market in Tokyo, Hongkong, New York and London, a team of English underwater archaeologists began to search for the source in 1997–99. Some 70 meters down, they found the wreck of a 15th-century merchant ship. This junk was 30 meters long und 7 meters wide, a flat-bottomed, oceangoing vessel with a spacious cargo hold.

The Cù Lao Chàm wreck was remarkably well preserved, and its cargo was also sensational: 300 000 objects were salvaged in all. For the most part, the finds consisted of late-15th-century ceramic vessels made in the pottery kilns of the North Vietnamese province of Hải Dương. Other finds indicate that the ship and its crew may have come from Thailand.

Epilogue

Tradition and Entertainment

Tradition und Unterhaltung

Vietnamese water puppetry

The Tradition of water puppetry goes back to the 11th century. It probably originated in performances held during the rainy Monsoon period. The contents of plays and mode of their performance were strict secrets which were only passed on within the performers' families. In the 17th and 18th centuries, water puppetry was mainly performed during temple festivals or at royal courts. By the 1980s, it had almost passed into extinction. Then a French organisation took it upon itself to revitalize the tradition. Today, performances are restricted to Hanoi and Ho-Chi-Minh-City.

The plays usually revolve around legends or everyday occurrences, with water generally playing a major role. Other subjects include the mystical dances of lions and fire-breathing dragons as well as stories of the four sacred animals: Phoenix, Kylin, Long and Turtle. During a play, the puppeteers perform an average of 17 scenes, for which they need some 100 puppets. Even though they are handled with care, the puppets last only about four months until they have to be replaced. The music and spoken dialogue are provided by the accompanying orchestra.

A Change of Position

Standortwechsel

The German perspective on Vietnam

Only a handful of Europeans had penetrated as far as Southeast Asia by the 16th century. Then, it was gradually discovered by missionaries and merchants, but only few of these came from German-speaking regions.

The Far East did not really figure in German politics until the French brought the Vietnamese Empire under control as a part of their Indochina colony. The First Indochina War (1946 to 1954) between France and the “League for the Independence of Vietnam” generated some interest in the German public. This was partly due to the peculiar situation in which a divided Germany found itself, with the German Democratic Republic siding with the Communist bloc, and the Federal Republic of Germany with the western allies.

This awareness increased even further with the Second Indochina War (1964 to 1975), which was to become notorious as the “Vietnam War”. While the conflict in Southeast Asia was largely discussed and condemned through official channels in the GDR, public opposition to the war in the West came mostly from non-government movements.

With the end of hostilities, Vietnam did not fade from view. The GDR continued to hire Vietnamese personnel as contractual workers, while the FRG focused on the influx of refugees who were saved by ships such as the “Cap Anamur”. Today, around 100 000 Vietnamese live in a reunited Germany, while some 150 000 Germans visit Vietnam each year as tourists. And this number looks to increase further...

Marco Polo and Company

Marco Polo & Co

European merchants and missionaries in Vietnam

Finds from China indicate that the earliest indirect European contacts with Southeast Asia go back to the Roman Era. Only much later would Europeans themselves attempt this difficult journey. The Venetian merchant Marco Polo (c. 1254–1324) may have visited Vietnam during his journey to China. But it

would take another two centuries until Portuguese seafarers sighted the coast of Vietnam in the 16th century. Its proximity to China, but also products such as silk, porcelain and other luxuries made the country an attractive destination for 17th-century traders from Portugal, the Netherlands, and – increasingly – from England. However, the political instability of the divided country hampered business prospects.

For along time, the only contacts with the German-speaking world were provided by Christian missionaries. The accounts of merchants and missionaries would remain the only source of information to reach Central Europe. The first German book to deal with Vietnam was only published at the end of the 18th century.

Religion and Economic Interests

Religion und Wirtschaftsinteressen

The struggle for colonial Indochina

From the beginning of the 19th century, the French became the dominant European power in Vietnam. They expanded their influence on the population and government circles both through Christianity and their advanced capability in the natural sciences. There was some resistance, however: missionaries were sometimes expelled, even executed. In 1862 the French enforced the cession of South Vietnam, and by 1884 they had extended their rule over the whole country. The Vietnamese regions of Cochinchina, Annam and Tonkin were combined with Cambodia and Laos to form the “Indochinese Union”. The French exploited the economy of their colony, and there were frequent conflicts with the indigenous population.

With the exception of some individual travellers, scientists and German-speaking Soldiers of the Foreign Legion, German interest in the region remained minimal. It only came to the attention of a wider public for a short spell when the representatives of trade concerns demanded a takeover by the

new German Empire after the French were defeated in the Franco-German War of 1870-1871.

An Unexpected Outcome

Unerwarteter Ausgang

The Indochina War and Independence

The hopes which the Vietnamese held after the end of World War II of being recognised once more as an independent state were soon disappointed.

The French made it clear that they intended to reestablish their colonial empire and were not going to accept the Declaration of Independence made on September 2nd, 1945. From 1946 on, the supporters of the “Việt Minh” began to prepare for armed conflict. As their armament was hopelessly inferior to that of the French troops, they began to wage a guerilla war. Soon, the Soviet Union and China stepped in to provide war materiel. The French were defeated in 1954, and a conference agreed on the provisional partition of Vietnam into a northern and southern half. A planned reunification did not take place as the South – and the USA – feared that the North’s Communists would prevail in elections. Vietnam was subjected to the world politics of the Cold War as the North was supported by the Soviet Union and the South by the USA. The reactions in East and West Germany mirrored this situation.

A Clash of Systems

Kampf der Systeme

The Vietnam War

The First Indochina War had already shown that a fundamental conflict of systems was being fought in Vietnam. The Communist camp was pushing for an expansion of its influence, while the USA and their allies strove to contain

Communism. After the partition of the country, the USA tried to stabilize the South Vietnamese government with increased aid, while Hanoi supported those who fought for a reunification of South and North. In 1964, an incident in the Gulf of Tonkin – which remains controversial to this day – allowed the USA to intervene more actively, thus triggering the “Vietnam War”. This conflict lasted until 1973, and it was conducted with a massive deployment of modern war materiel (by the USA), enormous losses (especially of the Vietnamese parties), and great bitterness. The USA were finally forced to pull out of the country, and in 1975, North Vietnamese troops succeeded in conquering all of South Vietnam. The War provoked a wide range of negative reactions throughout the world: While the governments of Socialist countries generally supported North Vietnam, opposition movements in the West vehemently criticised the American involvement in the South.

New Beginnings at Home and Abroad

Neuanfang Zuhause und in der Fremde

The Vietnamese in Germany

The end of the Vietnam War did not bring an end to the involvement of the GDR and the FRG. The GDR now deploy a larger number of personel to the pacified and reunified country. As production facilities in Vietnam were reconstructed, the exchange of goods was stepped up. The FRG, on the other hand, had withdrawn all aid personel and support from the country after the defeat of the South. Only gradually would development aid programs be reestablished, followed by an increase in economic transactions.

For the Germans themselves, the arrival of Vietnamese in Germany was more significant. In East Germany, they came to work from 1980 on, though most of these people would return home after German reunification. The West was confronted with the so-called boat people, refugees who had left their country by the hazardous sea route to escape the changed political and economic

situation. All in all, the relations between Germany and Vietnam can be described as normal today.

Scientific Collaboration between Brother States

Wissenschaftlicher Austausch zwischen Bruderstaaten

The ¹⁴C-Laboratory in East Berlin

The 1964 “jungle expedition” of GDR scientists described at the start of this exhibition was but one aspect of the cooperation between the scientific communities of the German Democratic Republic and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Archaeologists and ethnologists from Saxony played a role in this. Rosemarie Zell, who worked at the *Museum für Völkerkunde* (Ethnographical Museum) in Dresden from 1967 to 1985, was a specialist on Vietnam who increased the museum’s collection by acquiring a large number of objects. In 1971, she travelled to Vietnam with Heinz-Joachim Vogt, who later became Director of the *Landesmuseum für Vorgeschichte* (State Museum of Prehistory) in Dresden. While she researched the country, its people, and their crafts, Vogt would evaluate the Vietnamese museums. Unfortunately, the projects which might have sprung from this never materialised.

On the other hand, the cooperation between the Institute for Archaeology in Hanoi and Hans Quitta had far-reaching results. Quitta, whose Leipzig doctoral thesis had investigated the Neolithic settlement of Zwenkau-Harth, was head of the East Berlin ¹⁴C Laboratory from 1957. This lab was instrumental in establishing the time frame of Vietnamese Prehistory and Early History through its analysis of 215 radiocarbon samples.

English translation: Dr. Martin Baumeister

IMPRESSUM

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