

seems to be the best explanation for the rapid increase of archaeological sites and for the richness of many burials in this region.

FLOURISHING HANDICRAFTS

In addition, during the last centuries B.C., the majority of the traditional handicrafts appeared, with the main varieties of tool, equipment, and methods that remained typical until the recent pre-industrial economy in Viet Nam (figs. 2a–b). Potters produced variable forms of richly decorated ceramics in a range of sizes, from only a few centimeters to 1.3 m in height. These were often painted with red or black pigment, and were fired in the open ground over layers of firewood, with only a covering of rice straw.

Bronze-cast drums, bells, vessels, weapons, and ornaments were also manufactured, often with rich geometric designs or realistic figures (cat. nos. 1, 3, 6, 5; figs. 3a–b). Clothes, arms, the animal world, house and boat forms, and other aspects of daily life are depicted in detail on many bronze objects, as in almost no other source of Vietnamese history until the appearance of the early French picture postcards at the end of the nineteenth century A.D. Bimetallic objects were produced during the Bronze Age to Iron Age transition about 300 B.C., although we have only a small number of finds, such as a spearhead from Cuong Ha in Quang Binh Province, or a socketed axe from Go Ma Voi in Quang Nam Province (fig. 4a). Many tools, weapons, and objects for daily life were forged from iron, among them swords, axes, hoes, sickles, knives, and also tweezers for cosmetics (fig. 4b).

Glassworkers made earrings and beads in many colors. Stonecutters used nephrite, rock crystal, or garnet to produce earrings, pendants, or beads in many different shapes (cat. nos. 17–18; figs. 5a–b). In view of the rich amounts of ornaments made from carnelian or agate, which partly have typical local shapes, it is difficult to accept an outside production for all.

In burials of this period, the earliest gold objects in this region—earrings, beads, and even the first gold masks—were also found. Although textiles are only rarely preserved in the ground, abundant evidence exists for spinning and weaving, including clothing in boat coffins of the Dong Son culture, imprints of fabric covers on iron or bronze objects, and ceramic spindle whorls in burials of all the cultures of this period. During the last decades, many objects made from organic materials have been discovered. Among them are implements of the same type as those still used today in the countryside or in traditional handicrafts to make furniture, boats, houses, matting, wicker baskets, or lacquered goods.

DISTINCT NEIGHBORS

Cultural differences in an area that covers 1,650 kilometers from north to south are not surprising. Otherwise, enough evidence exists to prove numerous contacts between peoples by a flourishing coastal trade. Nevertheless, between the Dong Son tribes in the north and the Sa Huynh groups in central and southern Viet Nam, so many distinct differences are identifiable in burial custom, the kinds and combination of offerings, ceramic types, jewelry preferences, and symbols of rank that we have to assume the existence of two distinct populations: a Viet-speaking Austroasiatic people in the north, and a Chamic-speaking Austronesian people in the south.⁶ The border between these two different cultural areas can probably be placed in north-central Viet Nam between the “Porte d’Annam” and the “Col des Nuages,” where the plain between the sea coast and the Truong Son range shrinks to a narrow strip of some dozen kilometers.