

Here, especially in the provinces of Thua Thien-Hue or Quang Tri, despite one hundred years of archaeological research in Viet Nam, we know of only a handful of sites from the whole of the last millennium B.C. These, the archaeologically poorest and narrowest of all the provinces in central Viet Nam, were easy to control and—considering the extremely heavy rainy season in this region—probably unfavorable for settlement.<sup>7</sup>

To the south, the Sa Huynh culture extended over seven hundred kilometers up to the provinces of Dong Nai and Ba Ria-Vung Tau, thus up to the southeast of the present Sai Gon. Sites of this culture have not been found in many areas with the same density but are concentrated in some regions.<sup>8</sup> In the Dong Nai delta, the Sa Huynh culture has merged with elements of the Bronze Age Dong Nai culture. To the west of Sai Gon—that is, in the north and northwest of Long An Province—distinct cultural characteristics could be described as part of a pre-Fu Nan or pre-Oc Eo culture, with contacts and influences derived by river from present-day Cambodia.

#### SETTLEMENT AREAS—BURIAL CULTURES

The areas with the greatest density of finds from the pre-Christian metal age in Viet Nam are in the northern provinces of Ha Tay, Phu Tho, and Thanh Hoa, with a quarter of all known sites from this period in the whole country. In central Viet Nam, the largest number of known finds is from about fifty burial sites or settlements in Quang Nam Province, while in southern Viet Nam, the province of Dong Nai has revealed evidence from about sixty archaeological sites. The great differences in regional find density cannot be explained solely by unequal intensity of archaeological fieldwork. Rather, we have to assume that favorable settlement conditions existed in the more intensely occupied landscapes, such as fertile soils, capable irrigation systems, and especially positions near ancient trade routes like the Red or Ma rivers in the north, the Thu Bon River in central Viet Nam and the Dong Nai or Be rivers in the south, all of which connected the coastal communities with the inland or mountain tribes.

The coastline has been continually altered up to the present day, especially in the delta areas, by the constant discharge of sediment by these great rivers. This seems to be the reason for the lack or the small number of archaeological finds dating to centuries B.C. in some of the coastal provinces, for example between the Quang Ninh and Ninh Binh provinces in the north, or along the whole coastal area southwest of Sai Gon.

The overwhelming majority of all archaeological artifacts were discovered in burials. Even in northern Viet Nam, where many settlements, often with several meters of cultural layers, have been excavated (fig. 6), house structures, fortifications, or workshops are only rarely documented. Therefore the first “Golden Age” in Viet Nam is represented mainly by “burial cultures” with their equipment for “the other world.” The exhibition accurately reflects this research situation—nearly all the exhibits have been uncovered in graves.

Manifold reasons exist as to why evidence from the context of the remains of daily life is so little known. The simple wooden construction of the houses could not resist the flooding and hurricanes that arise many times during each generation. Most organic domestic utensils could not survive two thousand years in dry soils deficient in lime. And after all, much of the settlement evidence has been destroyed by intensive agriculture, exploiting the same favorable areas of land over the last two millennia. In addition, though about fifty archaeological excavations take place every year in Viet Nam, they are mostly small-scale areas covering only a

FIG. 6

A test excavation in 2002 at Dinh Trang near the Dong Son fortification of Co Loa, about 30 km northeast of Ha Noi, uncovered a 1.7 m deep sequence of cultural layers from the late Phung Nguyen to the Dong Son culture (about 1600 B.C. to the 1st century A.D.).

